

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN ASIA:
AN ENGENDERED ELECTION REPORT



PARLIAMENATRY ELECTION BANGLADESH 2008

BY

**THE RESEARCHERS &
WOMEN AND POLITICS IN ASIA FORUM
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The  **Researchers**
Solutions for Sustainable Development


**Women
and
Politics
in
Asia** Forum

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Foreword

The Researchers (TR) observed the Bangladeshi elections under its regional initiative, **Women & Politics in Asia Forum (WPAF)**. WPAF initiative focuses on role of women in politics in Asia along with additional focus on women contested constituencies. Under this initiative WPAF's Thailand Chapter – King Prajadhopak Institute (KPI) followed the Thai elections held in December 2007. Elections in Pakistan were held in February 2008 and 65, out of 179, directly contested women constituencies were observed by TR. Nepal's Constituent Assembly's election were held in April 2008 having substantial number of women contesting on general and reserved seats which were also observed.

In the dynamics of Women in Politics in Asia the Bangladeshi election were of critical importance not only as it was to bring democracy back but also that the two major political parties were led by politically influential women representing dynastic family politics. Hence WPAF & TR decided to go ahead with the report to compile the election report to document the political dynamics and participation of women at different level of the election 2008.

Election observation for TR & WPAF is not merely reporting of facts but an opportunity to research the political dynamics that lead up to the Election Day and then corroborate the same with factual data. This report brings out the role of women and their achievements besides providing an overarching political-electoral history and chronology of events in Bangladesh. It also documents the electoral reform processes that were undertaken and responses of the political parties to the same till the Election day was dawned.

The report does not exclusively focus on women dynamics in the electoral and political processes but has attempted to provide a mainstreamed view. Electoral processes were generally gender neutral but political processes were led by two women that to engender the political sphere. In the recent political processes political struggle for women has generally been seen to be more from the party platform than personal.

The pre-election observation was initiated in May 2008 by WPAF. The timely accreditation to international observers got delayed from the Bangladeshi Election Commission. It was received in WPAF Dhaka Chapter on the eve of Election which logistically hampered the TR team to reach Bangladesh in time to be deployed as short term observers. Election Day reporting was facilitated by WPAF Bangladeshi Chapter, Democracy Watch (DW). The DW was also part of the larger donor supported Election Working Group (EWG), facilitated by The Asia Foundation (TAF). Both these inputs have been used to enrich and substantiate the research part of the report.

WPAF would like to thank and appreciate the effort of the TR research team led by Ms. Fauzia Yazdani, including Ms. Rabia Khaliq, and Mr. Aazar Ayaz for their contribution to the research, analysis and compilation of report.

Aazar Ayaz
WPAF, Islamabad
April 2009

CHAPTER 1

Bangladesh – An Overview

1.1 Geographic Layout

Bangladesh, a country with an area of approximate 144,000 sq km, is located between latitudes 20~34' and 26~38' north and latitudes 88~01' and 92~41' east. The country is border by the Bay of Bengal in south, while on the three directions, it is bordered by India. However, on the southeastern edge, Bangladesh has small border with Myanmar. Total boundary length of the country is 4,246 km. Bangladesh, now an independent state, was previously the eastern province of Pakistan. Then it was known as East Pakistan.

1.2 Economic and Social Layout

State of Economy: The economy has grown 5-6% per year since 1996 despite inefficient state-owned enterprises, delays in exploiting natural gas resources, insufficient power supplies, and slow implementation of economic reforms. Bangladesh remains a poor, overpopulated, and inefficiently-governed nation. Although more than half of GDP is generated through the service sector, nearly two-thirds of Bangladeshis are employed in the agriculture sector, with rice as the single-most-important product. Garment exports and remittances from Bangladeshis working overseas, mainly in the Middle East and East Asia, fuel economic growth. In 2008 Bangladesh pursued a monetary policy aimed at maintaining high employment, but created higher inflation in the process.

Following are some of the facts revealing state of economy in Bangladesh:

GDP (purchasing power parity):	\$228.4 billion (2008 est.)
GDP (official exchange rate):	\$83.04 billion (2008 est.)
GDP - real growth rate:	5.9% (2008 est.)
GDP - per capita (PPP):	\$1,500 (2008 est.)
GDP - composition by sector:	agriculture: 19.1%, industry: 28.6%, services: 52.3% (2008 est.)
Labor force:	70.86 million (extensive export of labor to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Oman, Qatar, and Malaysia; workers' remittances estimated at \$4.8 billion in 2005-06. (2008 est.)
Unemployment rate:	2.5% (includes underemployment) (2008 est.)
Public debt:	34.6% of GDP (2008 est.)
Inflation rate (consumer prices):	9.4% (2008 est.)

Ethnic Groups: Bengali are 98% while others which include tribal groups and non-Bengali Muslims constitute 2% of the total population.

Religions: Muslims are in majority. They are 83% of the total population. Hindus are 16% and others are 1%.

Languages: 95 percent Bangla, 5 percent other dialects; English is spoken widely.

1.3 Government Structure

The President, while chief of state, holds a largely ceremonial post; the real power is held by the Prime Minister, who is head of government. The President is elected by the legislature (Parliament) every 5 years. The President's circumscribed powers are substantially expanded during the tenure of a caretaker government. Under the 13th Amendment, which Parliament passed in March 1996, a caretaker government assumes power temporarily to oversee general elections after dissolution of the Parliament. In the caretaker government, the President has control over the Ministry of Defense, the authority to declare a state of emergency, and the power to dismiss the Chief Adviser and other members of the caretaker government. Once elections have been held and a new government and Parliament are in place, the President's powers and position revert to their largely ceremonial role. The Chief Adviser and other advisers to the caretaker government must be appointed within 15 days after the current Parliament expires.

The Prime Minister is appointed by the President. The Prime Minister must be a Member of Parliament (MP) who the President feels commands the confidence of the majority of other MPs. The cabinet is composed of ministers selected by the Prime Minister and appointed by the President. At least 90% of the ministers must be MPs. The other 10% may be non-MP experts or "technocrats" who are not otherwise disqualified from being elected MPs. According to the constitution, the President can dissolve Parliament upon the written request of the Prime Minister.

The legislature is a unicameral, 300-seat body. All of its members are elected by universal suffrage at least every five years. Parliament amended the constitution in May 2004, making a provision for 45 seats reserved for women to be distributed among political parties in proportion to their numerical strength in Parliament. The AL did not take its share of the reserved seats, arguing that it did not support the indirect election or nomination of women to fill these seats. Several women's groups also demanded direct election to fill the reserved seats for women.

Bangladesh's judiciary is a civil court system based on the British model; the highest court of appeal is the appellate court of the Supreme Court. At the local government level, the country is divided into divisions, districts, sub districts, unions, and villages. Local officials are elected at the union level and selected at the village level. All larger administrative units are run by members of the civil service.

1.4 Administrative Divisions

At the local government level, the country is divided into divisions, districts, subdistricts (Upazila), unions, and villages. The lowest level of local government representative are Local officials of union council those who are elected at the union level election. All larger administrative units are run by members of the civil service.

CHAPTER 2

Political Overview of Bangladesh

2.1 Political Background since Independence

While Bangladesh is a parliamentary democracy, since independence, the political scene of the country has been tumultuous and the epochs of democratic rule have been intermittent by coups, martial law, and states of emergency. For almost half that time, the strong personals and/or military regimes ruled the country having little respect for democratic values. Notwithstanding, under numerous domestic and regional pressures, the country is struggling to establish, conserve and consolidate its fragile democratic institutions. In the pursuit of power, the mainstream political parties remained preoccupied with their mutual antagonism and antipathy. Consequently, despite of the cultural and ethnic homogeneity, the competing visions have held back the development of the country and aggravated the glum of poor governance and widespread corruption. The *Awami League* (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh's two largest parties, have virtually divided the country's electorate and its institutions between themselves since 1990. The BNP, considered right-of-centre, middle class, urban, anti-Indian, pro-Pakistani and of an Islamic bent, has led two governments in the past fifteen years; the *Awami League*, left-of-centre, secular, pro-Indian and rural, has led one¹.

Thirteen national polls (parliamentary and presidential elections and referendums) have been held in Bangladesh since its inception. Three such polls (parliamentary elections of 1973, 1991 and June 1996) were relatively free of serious charges of malpractices. At the presidential elections of 1978, 1981 and 1986, the parliamentary elections of 1979, 1986 and 1987, and the referendums of 1977 and 1985, all conducted under autocratic military regimes, there were serious discrepancies between the official claims and the estimates by independent observers in regard to voter turn-out, allegations of extensive vote rigging and voter intimidation, and landslide victories reported for the government candidate or the ruling party. The same could be said of the parliamentary elections conducted by the BNP regime in February 1996. At some of these polls (referendum of 1977, parliamentary elections of 1986, 1987 and February 1996, and the presidential election of 1986) all or most of the main opposition parties did not or could not participate².

Nature and Duration of the Different Forms of Government

Period	Nature of Regime	Duration
10 Jan 1972 to 28 Dec 1974	Awami League government in multi-party parliamentary system	3 years
25 Jan 1975 to 15 Aug 1975	One-party rule under Mujibur Rahman	7 months
15 Aug 1975 to 21 Apr 1977	Transitional phase towards military rule	1 year 8 months
21 Apr 1977 to 30 May 1981	Regime of General Ziaur Rahman	4 years 1 month

¹ Restoring Democracy in Bangladesh: Crisis Group Asia Report N°151, 28 April 2008

² Political Conflict in Bangladesh: *Ethnic Studies Report*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 1998

30 May 1981 to 24 Mar 1982	Transitional military regime	10 months
24 Mar 1982 to 6 Dec 1990	Regime of General Mohammad Ershad	8 years 9 months
6 Dec 1990 to 6 Feb 1991	Caretaker administration	2 months
6 Feb 1991 to 30 Mar 1996	Bangladesh Nationalist Party government headed by Khaleda Zia with multi-party parliament	5 years 2 months
30 Mar 1996 to 12 Jun 1996	Caretaker administration	2 months +
12 Jun 1996 to 2001	Awami League government headed by Sheikh Hasina with multi-party parliament coalition till 12 Jan 1997	5 years
1 st Oct 2001 to Oct 06	Bangladesh Nationalist Party government headed by Khaleda Zia with multi-party parliament	5 years

Source: *Ethnic Studies Report, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January 1998*

The political history of previous national polls shows its own characteristics of incoherent political system, personality focused political loyalties, disinclination by parties to accept electoral defeat with dignity and intense social distrust between major social groups. Elections pledges remain largely unaccomplished and the ruling regime always seem suspect to the opposition. Internal security and safety laws are cleverly used to repress opposition leaders and activists. Policies are disrupted by protests against the ruling regime and police actions. In addition, electronic media serving faithfully to the ruling party is not a new case in the history of Bangladesh's politics.

An Overview of Last Eight Parliamentary Elections

Date of Polls	No of Voters			% Votes Cast	% Invalid Votes	No. of Polling Stations	No. of Polling Booths	No. of Polling Officials
	Male	Female	Total					
3-Mar-73	N/A	N/A	3,52,05,642	55.61	1.36	15,084	59,113	1,92,423
28-Feb-79	2,00,34,717	1,83,29,141	3,83,638,58	51.29	1.05	21,905	67,150	2,23,355
7-May-86	2,52,24,385	2,26,52,594	4,78,76,979	66.31	0.79	23,279	89,816	2,92,727
3-Mar-88	2,63,79,944	2,34,83,885	4,98,63,829	51.81	–	–	–	2,83,237
27-Feb-91	3,30,40,757	2,91,40,986	6,21,81,743	55.45	0.6	24,154	11,277	3,60,985
15-Feb-96	2,37,65,752	2,32,38,204	5,61,49,182	26.54	0.22	21,106	98,710	3,14,480
12-Jun-96	2,87,59,994	2,79,56,941	5,67,16,935	74.96	0.82	25,957	1,14,749	3,70,204
1-Oct-01	3,86,84,972	3,63,15,684	7,50,00,656	75.59	0.8	29,978	1,49,288	4,77,842

Source: *Election Commission of Bangladesh*

Number of Parties and Candidates of Last Eight Parliamentary Elections

Year	No. of Parties/ Alliances Contested	No. of Candidates Contested	Candidates with Party Affiliation	No. of Independent Candidates	% Votes Polled by the Parties	% Votes Polled by the Independent
1973	14	1,209	1,089	120	50.74	2.81
1979	29	2,547	2,125	442	45.12	5.12
1986	28	1,980	1,527	453	49.93	9.65
1988	8	1,192	978	214	N/A	N/A
1991	75	2,787	2,363	2,363	52.44	2.41
1996	41	1	993	457	23.05	3.27
1996	81	2,574	2,293	281	74	0.79
2001	54	1,935	1,451	484	74.82	0.67

Source: Election Commission of Bangladesh

2.2 Women Representation in Previous Parliaments

In 1981, the Awami League chose Sheikh Hasina Wajid as their first female head of the party and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chose Begum Khaleda Zia as the first female party chairperson in 1984. These two highly popular women leaders at the top of public office have entered into politics mainly because of family connections. At present, Bangladesh is the only country in the world where both the head of government and the leader of the opposition are women.

Number of Elected Women Members to the Bangladesh Parliament (1973-2001)

Elected Women Members to the Bangladesh Parliament (1973-2001)					
Year of Election	% of Women Candidates	Won in Direct Seats and By-Elections	Total Elected Women	Reserved Seats	% of Women in the Parliament
1973	0.3	0	0	15	4.8 (Out of 3125 seats)
1979	0.9	0+2	2	30	9.69 (Out of 330 seats)
1986	1.3	5+2	7	30	11.21 (of 330 seats)
1988	0.7	4	4	0	1.33 (of 300 seats)
1991	1.5	8 +1	9	30	11.81 (of 330 seats)
1996	1.36	13+2	15	30	13.03 (of 330 seats)
2001	1.79	6	6	0	2.00

CHAPTER 3

Women in Bangladesh: Gender Status to Politics³

Bangladesh like much of South Asia, has always been a strongly **patriarchal country**. There are strict restrictions on women's ability to participate in the public domain – whether to earn an income, attend school, or take part in politics. It remains one of the world's poorer countries, classified by the United Nations as among its forty-eight least-developed economies.

However, Bangladesh has also been undergoing **major social transformation**. Poverty has been declining slowly but consistently over the past decade. There have also been important positive changes in the area of gender equality.

Successive governments have played an active role in improving girls' educational prospects. The gender gap in education has been eliminated at primary level and reduced at secondary level. A very active NGO Sector working largely with women from poorer households, has promoted self-employment opportunities for women in the countryside through the provision of micro credit, as well as greater awareness of their rights.

Poverty remains a major problem in Bangladesh and many people still go hungry. No amount of effort by NGOs can solve the problem of unemployment in a country where, despite declining rates of population growth, there are a million new entrants to the labour force each year. Women from poorer households who need paid work in order to survive face particular problems. Returns to women's enterprise are low and social barriers to women's participation in paid work outside the home remain strong, particularly in rural areas. Those women who do find wage work earn wages far below those of men.

In south Asia as elsewhere in the world, **religion** has come to play an increasing role in shaping and reshaping women's lives. In Bangladesh as well women's negotiation of the new spaces that religion has created can be empowering, but the nature of these spaces remains defined by patriarchy. This element is not being contested or denied; rather, what women seem to be doing is negotiating for greater rights within patriarchal structures.

3.1 Politics

Women have progressed to be relatively politically stable through a quota based representation in the local government and National Parliament. The entry of women in politics has been through social work, student politics and family politics. Despite many odds, statistics and analyses reveal a slowly growing trend towards women's political participation. However, their progress is constrained due to growing influence of money in Bangladesh politics, particularly in electoral politics, since fewer women have access to financial resources.

³ This chapter has been enriched by contributions from:

Online women in Politics (www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org),

Articles at Open Democracy, 3rd world thinkers (www.opendemocracy.net) from Professor Jala Alamgir, Professor Firdous Azim and Professor Farida Khan

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2000 (www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/sa/692.htm)

ADB Country Briefing Paper: Women in Bangladesh (2001) (www.adb.org)

3.2 Political Parties

Party affiliation depends on membership drives and on the organizational and electoral needs of each party. The actual number of women members in different political parties, however, cannot be determined, since gender-specific records are not maintained. As party workers, women render valuable contributions in the mobilization of voters, especially among other women.

Despite the two major parties led by women, there are a few women in party hierarchal leadership positions. They became leaders during crisis periods and have been successful as driving forces and unifying factors of their respective parties. Significantly, neither of them inherited the mantle of leadership when their party was in power. They have created their own dynamics and momentum to lead their parties, though their close and inner circle of advisors mostly consists of men.

By virtue of their positions they have created space for women in a society where traditionally men had exclusive prerogative in politics. They played a crucial role toward democratization and brought about a certain degree of continuity into the political process. They have a strong potential to be positive role models for women of all ages in Bangladesh, provided they demonstrate a commitment to gender equity by involving more women in their parties and in government. The election manifestos and constitutions of different political parties reveal that there is little emphasis on gender equality in party platforms.

3.3 Electoral Process

Despite the fact that women do not hold key party positions, they perform significantly during election campaigns by being key organizers of public meetings, processions, and rallies. Women party leaders and workers are entrusted to mobilize and undertake voter canvassing, particularly with women, for their party candidates. By making special arrangements such as separate election booths for women, and females presiding and polling officers, the turnout rate of women voters has increased. During the general elections of 1991 and 1996, and local level elections in 1993 and 1997, the level of enthusiasm among women to exercise their voting rights was encouraging. Because of the special arrangements and security measures taken by the Government, in previous elections, there were fewer disturbances at women polling centers.

3.4 Local Government

Women were first elected to local bodies in 1973. The Union Parishad Election of 1997 is a milestone in the history of political empowerment of women in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh enacted a law for direct elections to reserve seats for women in local level elections. In 1997 through an Act, the Government reserved three seats for women in the union parishad where women members are elected from each of the three respective wards. Apart from the reserved seats women can also contest for any of the general seats.

Previously, the process of selection of the women representatives was on the basis of nominations and/or indirect election. Around 12,828 women were elected as members in the 1997 local level elections. A total of 20 and 110 women were elected as chairpersons and members, respectively, for general seats. The Government has already issued different executive orders to ensure women members' participation in various decision-making committees.

The majority of women representatives regularly attended Parishad meetings, but fewer participate in the deliberations and decisions. Female representatives have been reported to be more involved in deliberation on the subject of mass education, family planning, immunization, handicrafts, relief activity, and shalish (mediation in the village court). Elected women need

training to strengthen and build their capacities for improved and effective execution of their roles and functions.

3.5 Cabinet and Public Services

Although Bangladesh has witnessed two women Prime Ministers, its yet to reflect a similar gender composition of participation and decision making at the highest policy level. At the ministerial level, women's representation has never risen above 3 percent. Historically, before 1996, women were never given full responsibility over any important ministry but only state or deputy ministers responsible for insignificant ministries such as Culture, Social Welfare, and Women.

3.6 Violence Against Women

Violence against women is difficult to quantify because of unreliable statistics, but it is reported to be widespread. The Government, the media, and women's rights organizations have fostered a growing awareness of the problem of violence against women.

Much of the violence against women is related to disputes over dowries, religious and otherwise vigilantism against women and acid-throwing. The attacks against women are mostly to settle personal and family scores where a female becomes the target.

Bangladeshi Government acceded to the U.N. Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Government also has enacted laws specifically prohibiting certain forms of discrimination against women, including the Anti-Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980, the Cruelty to Women Law of 1983, and the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act of 1995, which was replaced by the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act of 2000. However, enforcement of these laws is weak, especially in rural areas. There is extensive trafficking in women for the purpose of forced prostitution within the country and to other countries in Asia.

3.7 Education and Employment

Literacy rates are approximately 26 percent for women, compared with 49 percent for men. In recent years, female school enrollment has improved. Approximately 50 percent of primary and secondary school students are female. Women often are ignorant of their rights because of continued high illiteracy rates and unequal educational opportunities, and strong social stigmas and lack of economic means to obtain legal assistance frequently keep women from seeking redress in the courts.

Employment opportunities have improved due to the growth of the export garment industry. Eighty percent of the 1.4 million garment sector workers are women. Programs extending micro-credit to large numbers of rural women also have contributed that has led to their economic empowerment. Women hold only 12 percent of government jobs, and only 2 percent of senior positions.

The Government's policy to include more women in government jobs has had limited effect. In recent years, about 15 percent of all recruits into government service have been women. The garment and shrimp processing industries are the highest employers of female laborers. Forty-three percent of women work in the agriculture, fisheries, and livestock sectors, but 70 percent of them are unpaid family laborers. Many women work as manual laborers on construction projects as well, and constitute nearly 25 percent of all manufacturing workers. Women also are found in the electronics, food processing, beverage, and handicraft industries.

CHAPTER 4

Legal and Institutional Framework for Parliamentary Elections

4.1 Election Commission of Bangladesh

Chapter VII of the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh deals with the Elections. It defines the authorities and functions of Election Commission and the rules and procedures with respect of the conduct of elections. According to the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh:

1. There shall an Election Commission for Bangladesh consisting of a Chief Election Commissioner and such number of other Election Commissioners, if any as the President may from time to time direct, and the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election commissioners (if any) shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf, be made by the President.
2. When the Election Commission consists of more than one person, the Chief Election Commissioner shall act as the chairman thereof.
3. Subject to the provisions of this Constitution the term of office of an Election Commissioner shall be five years from the date on which he enters upon his office, and-
 - (a) a person who has held office as Chief Election Commissioner shall not be eligible for appointment in the service of the Republic;
 - (b) any other election Commissioner shall, on ceasing to hold office as such, be eligible for appointment as Chief Election Commissioner but shall not be otherwise eligible for appointment in the service of the Republic.
4. The Election Commission shall be independent in the exercise of its functions and subject only to this Constitution and any other law.
5. Subject to the provisions of any law made by Parliament, the conditions of service of Election Commissioners shall be such as the President may, by order, determine:
 - (a) Provided that an Election Commissioner shall not be removed from his office except in like manner and on the like grounds as a judge of the 72[Supreme Court.]
6. An Election Commissioner may resign his office by writing under his hand address to the President.

4.2 Final Delimitation of Constituencies of the Parliament

As per the Delimitation of Constituency Ordinance 1976:

- (1) The Election Commission shall, for the purpose of elections to the seats in Parliament, divide the country into as many single territorial constituencies as number of members to be elected under clause (2) of article 65 of the Constitution.
- (2) The constituencies shall be so delimited having regard to administrative convenience, that each constituency is a compact area and in doing so due regard shall be had as far as practicable to the distribution of population as given in the latest census report.

Constituency Map



4.3 Election Schedule

Schedule of 9th Parliamentary Election 2008	
Last date of filing of Nomination Papers	30-Nov-08
Dates of Scrutiny of Nomination Papers	03-04 Dec-08
Last date withdrawal	11-Dec-08
Polling date	29-Dec-08

4.4 The Representation of Peoples Order, 1979 (As Amended up-to October 2008)

The Representation of Peoples Order, 1979, which was amended for the second time in October 2008, gives a comprehensive detail regarding conduct of elections. It spells out the rules applicable in appointment of Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers, establishment of polling stations, appointment of presiding and polling officers and supply of electoral rolls. It also covers procedure and rules regarding alteration in the election program, nomination for election, deposit, scrutiny of nomination papers, publication of the list of candidates, withdrawal of papers, retirement from elections, death of a candidate after nomination, as well as postponement of elections in certain circumstances. It contains the information regarding the design of the ballot boxes, voting and vote count procedures.

RPO also deals with of **election expenses**. For the first time in the country's history, RPO made it mandatory for the political parties willing to contest in parliamentary polls to disclose sources of their funds at the time of registration with the Election Commission. According to RPO the parties must submit to the Election Commission details of their bank accounts and sources of funds at the time of applying for registration. The new provisions in the RPO allow political parties, also for the first time, to receive donations or grants officially. It says that a registered political party may receive a donation of Tk 5 lakh or property or service equivalent to it from an individual in a calendar year, while it may receive Tk 25 lakh or property or service equivalent to it from a company or an organisation in a calendar year. No registered political party may receive any gift, donation, grant or money from any foreign country or any non-government organisation or from any person who is not a Bangladeshi citizen or from any organisation established or maintained by such a person, says the new electoral law.

The amount of the money or any portion thereof shall not be utilized for:

- § printing of a poster with more than one colour;
- § printing of a poster of a size bigger than the size prescribed of specified by the Commission;
- § erection of any gate, arch or barricade;
- § setting up a *Pandal* (open area) covering an area of more than four hundred square feet;
- § employing or using more than three microphones or loudspeakers at a time in a constituency;
- § commencing election publicity in any manner at any time three weeks prior to the date fixed for the poll;
- § setting up more than one election camp or office in any union or in any ward of a municipality or city, of more than one central election camp or office in any constituency;
- § entertainment of electors in any manner;
- § using any vehicle or vessel such as, truck, bus, car, taxi, motor cycle and speed-boat, for taking out any procession; or
- § hiring or using any vehicle or vessel of any kind for conveying electors to or from any polling station;
- § illumination by use to electricity in any form; or
- § using symbol or portrait of candidate with more than one colour; or
- § display of a symbol exceeding the size proposed by the commission.
- § writing in ink or paint or in any manner whatsoever as means of advertisement for propagating election campaign;
- § operating camps on the polling day.

The conduct of administration and transfer related matters are described in RPO. There is also detail of the procedure of handling election related disputes. No election shall be called in question except by an election petition presented by a candidate for that election in accordance with the provisions of RPO.

RPO highlights the election related offences and the penalties associated with them. Under a new sub-clause interpolated into the RPO, anyone found outside the polling center with ballot papers or ballot book will be penalised. RPO covers rules and regulations that a party must follow in order to register with the Commission. The amended RPO says the constitution of a political party seeking registration cannot contradict the country's constitution. The political parties who will get registered with the Election Commission through submitting the provisional constitution will have to submit their ratified constitution to the EC within six months of the first sitting of the ninth parliament. The party cannot register with the Election Commission if the political party is declared banned by the Government or if the political party does not participate in the parliamentary elections for two consecutive terms.

Due to the **amendments in political parties' registration rules**, BNP and Jamat e Islami had to make some major changes in their Constitutions. The interim constitution of BNP did not provide for front organisations and chapters abroad. It however had a provision like arch-rival AL's to allow associated organisations. As per the provisional constitution, the party's parliamentary board would nominate parliamentary contenders from panels to be prepared by the grassroots. In line with the revised RPO, BNP will work to ensure that 33 percent seats in all of its committees are reserved for women by 2020.

Jamaat-e-Islami has changed 12/13 sections in its constitution. The phrases 'establishing the rule of Allah' have been replaced by 'establishing a fair and just Islamic society'. Like BNP, it scrapped the provision for front organisations. Besides, the party has included a section to let non-Muslims become its members. In its provisional charter, Jamaat has been renamed Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami. Before, it was Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh. Jamaat also dropped a symbol with the words 'Allahu' and 'Aqimuddin' in Arabic from the cover of its provisional constitution. Besides, the party has included a new section that says, "Jamaat-e-Islami will work to establish an Islamic social system that guarantees justice for all since Bangladesh emerged as the third largest Muslim country through a heroic battle of people and freedom fighters."

4.5 Salient Features of the Code of Conduct for Parliamentary Election 2008 *(Revised)*

Following are the main features of the revised code of conduct for parliamentary election 2008.

- § Candidates or representatives of the candidates will not be allowed to give any donation or payment to any institution or organisation in or outside of his or her constituency. Candidates will not be allowed to make any pledge either to the voters of any development works in future in the constituency. But there is no bar to presenting any plan of the political parties relating to the national and local development
- § The political parties and candidates must inform the police about the time and venue of their rallies in advance so that the authorities can take necessary steps to ensure public movement and maintain law and order.
- § It is prohibited that posters, leaflets or handbills will be posted overlaying the posters, leaflets of handbills of rival candidates.
- § Each candidate will be allowed to set up only one election camp in a union or ward. No election camp will be allowed to be set up on the roads or places for public use. Election camps should be simple, as far as possible; voters cannot be entertained with any sort of food or drinks in the camps.
- § Posters for election campaigns must be printed on country-made paper in black and white and cannot be more than 22"x18" in size. Candidates can use the photo of the party chief in the poster. But it must be a portrait, not any kind of photo where the party chief is seen leading a procession, or a programme or on prayer.
- § Candidates are not allowed to make any cap, shirt and t-shirt for election campaign.
- § All sorts of illuminations for election campaign are prohibited.

- § Contenders, political parties and representatives of the candidates are not allowed to use helicopter or any other air transport for election campaign. However, the chiefs of the political parties can travel by helicopter during election campaign, but not allowed to carry any banners, leaflets on the copter.
- § No political party or candidate can give any unpalatable or provocative statement and say anything which might hurt the sentiment of the followers of any religion.
- § Contenders are not allowed to start election campaign, three weeks before the voting date.
- § Neither a political party nor a contender is allowed to carry out campaign in any Mosque, Temple, Church or any other religious places.
- § Only the employees and officials engaged in election duties, rival candidates, polling agents, local and foreign election observers and voters will have access to the polling centres. No worker of the political parties or candidate will be allowed freedom of movement inside the polling centres. Only the polling agents, sitting in their fixed places, may perform their specific duties.

Complete code of conduct for Parliamentary Election 2008 is attached as Annex 1.

CHAPTER 5

Pre-Election Phase Observation

5.1 General Process

5.1.1 Assessment of Political Processes

At the end of 2006 in the overture to the transfer of power, the **political situation** was highly confrontational and tense. The outgoing BNP-led four-party coalition government was to transfer the power to the caretaker government after completing its tenure of 5 years. Whereas, the BNP and AL-led 14 party coalition opposition failed to resolve their differences on the appointment of chief advisor of the caretaker government. The appointment of the most recently retired chief justice as the chief adviser of the caretaker government is the first constitutionally mandated option, who generally exercise full executive power of the republic and is responsible for establishing new parliament by conducting free and fair elections. The AL-led 14 party coalition opposition also questioned the neutrality of Election Commission in holding free and fair elections and the credibility of electoral roll. The coalition opposition intimidated to boycott the general elections if a neutral chief advisor and chief election commission is not appointed.

The **clashes escalated** into violence across the country causing several deaths and injuries. In order to mediate tension and make the transition stable, the president in addition to his presidential responsibilities took charge of the office of chief advisor. The confrontation between the AL-led 14 party coalition opposition and the chief adviser of the caretaker government continued even after president's take over. The question of neutrality of the president was also raised, as he was the elected president as BNP nominee. In the intervening time, the chief adviser announced a schedule for the general parliamentary election on 22 January 2007.

In addition, to prove the nonaligned status of the **caretaker government**, major changes in the police administration were made and a number of senior officials were transferred. Not satisfied with these measures, the coalition opposition demanded for the cancellation of the polls, correction of the electoral rolls, and reconstitution of the Election Commission. To press the government for their demands, the opposition parties started rallies and strikes countrywide. These strikes, blockades and violent activities continued to increase across the country and the failure of caretaker government to stop these lead to the declaration of the state of emergency. Amid a political turmoil and violence, the state of emergency not only stalled the up coming elections but other civil and political rights of the people were also suspended. The president, Iajuddin Ahmed, promulgated the state of emergency amid political crisis.

With the **declaration of emergency**, the military-controlled interim government launched drives against law and order situation and corruption mainly targeted at politicians. It detained more than 200 leading politicians, including Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia the two top leaders and sent them into exile. Later on, the government also initiated some electoral reforms, such as making it mandatory for political parties to register with the Election Commission, compilation of new electoral roll with voters' photographs to avoid cheating.

In September 2008, the military-controlled interim government, which ruled Bangladesh since January 2007, announced the date for national election. The Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed declared to hold the elections on 18 December 2008 to transfer power to a civilian government. The Bangladesh High Court granted bail to detained leaders Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajid paving the way for a peaceful transition to democracy and ensure participation of the country's two main political parties in December polls.

Besides all the **measures and initiatives taken by the interim government**, the transfer of power and holding national elections was not a soft road. With the announcement of elections on 18 December 2008, the BNP-led 4 party alliance placed before the government and the Election Commission a five-point demand, including withdrawal of state of emergency and scrapping of the Representation of the People Order (Amendment) 2008, as conditions for participating in the upcoming parliamentary election. They also demanded for the release of other alliance leaders and activists. The four-party alliance announced for holding countrywide rallies to press their five-point demand.

The **demands from political parties** and other rights organizations put immense pressure on the interim government. It marked a drastic shift in the caretaker administration and EC's stance over the way the polls should be organised. The emergency was lifted on 17 December 2008 and fundamental rights reinstated after around two years to buoy the peaceful conduct of the national polls. Along side, a new date for the polls was announced in order to provide enough time to political parties for electioneering and other election preparations. Being delayed for the third time, 29 December 2008 were announced as the final date for the general election. With the uplift of state of emergency, the political parties carried out electioneering without having to face any restrictions. The Election Commission, 15 days before the general elections, announced the final list of 1,538 candidates running for the national polls.

5.1.2 Donors' Assistance to Elections

The international community used two windows to provide joint financial and technical assistance for the conduct of Parliamentary Elections 2008 through UNDP and TAF.

UNDP funded a three years project "Preparation of Electoral Roll with Photographs and Facilitating the Issuance of National Identity (ID) Card". The Bangladesh Election Commission, actively working with UNDP, introduced several tools designed to increase the accuracy, transparency, and credibility of this election:

- § A new voter list with photographs, which helped to reduce voter fraud, revised constituency boundaries ensured each vote had comparable weight, and
- § A new nationwide ICT infrastructure, which improved access to information on candidates, the voter list and Election Day results.

The voter list project was formulated as a pooled funded project administered by UNDP and implemented by the BEC with funding from the Government of Bangladesh and financial support from nine international development partners (Denmark, the European Commission, Republic of Korea, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and UNDP).

The Election Working Group (EWG), was technically facilitated by TAF, a non-partisan, 32-member network of civil society organizations. Established in 2006, EWG members shared a common commitment to free and fair elections and good governance in Bangladesh. During Parliamentary Election 2008, the activities EWG included voter education and election observation. Since 2006, EWG received financial support and technical assistance from The Asia Foundation. WPAF, Bangladesh Chapter, Democracy Watch, was also member of the EWG.

5.1.3 Voters

This was the first time that Election Commission decided to **use national ID cards with photographs** to avoid bogus voting. It was a UN-funded initiative of digital electoral roll. 11 million

false names were removed from the voter lists before elections. A total of 81,130,973 voters were registered, and, for the first time in Bangladeshi history, over fifty percent were women.

Voter education was mainly carried out through media and the distribution of posters and pamphlets. A number of Public Service Announcements (PSAs) about polling procedures were aired on national television. These PSAs played a crucial role in ensuring voters were familiar with the process on Election Day. The Election Commission left large scale voter and civic education duties to CSOs such as Election Working Group (EWG), a national 32-member coalition of CSOs and the most prominent group undertaking voter education activities for the ninth parliamentary elections.

The national-level voter and civic education program included:

- § Production and distribution of 9 million copies of four parliamentary Voter Guides on the role and responsibilities of Members of Parliament as national policy makers and lawmakers, women's electoral participation, issues of interest to first-time voters (youth vote), and the election manifestos of major political parties.
- § Production of four public service announcements (PSAs) for television and radio broadcast on the themes of independent voter choice, accountability of elected representatives, the importance of women's participation in elections, and the role and expectations of first-time voters.

The local-level voter and civic education initiative included:

- § Establishment of Citizen's Alliances for Promoting Transparency and Accountability (CAPTAs or accountability committees) at the upazila level. The CAPTA committees of respected business persons, school principals and teachers, women's leaders, religious leaders, and other community members) contributed to the planning and implementation of local voter and civic education activities.
- § Local program activities included candidate meetings, rallies, cultural performances, and other activities on the themes of accountability, election violence prevention, women and youth issues, and the electoral rights and participation of religious and ethnic minorities and disabled persons.

5.1.4 Phases of Electoral Rolls Preparation

First Phase: Data Collection

Primary Stage

- § Preparation of area-based primary estimation of voters on the basis of previous electoral roll
- § Recruitment of required numbers of assistant registration officers (AROs), and one supervisor for every five enumerators and one enumerator for every 300-400 voters on the basis of the estimations.
- § As such recruitments get underway, building awareness among the people about the process by using mass media
- § Forming various committees comprising local public representatives, and representatives of local administration and civil society to further coordination
- § Publishing advertisements for the recruitments of area-based data entry operators, team leaders etc., sorting through the received job applications, taking exams and giving appointments.
- § Printing and distribution of Form-2 for data collection

- § Preparing registrar books, voter slips and procuring stamp pads for enumerators. Handing the procured goods over to district election officers
- § Taking steps to enroll voters in jails under special arrangements

Middle Stage

- § Arranging one-day orientation for assistant registration officers
- § Imparting three-day training to supervisors and enumerators
- § Imparting 3-10 days of training to data entry operators and team leaders
- § Giving the Form-2 and other required items out to enumerators
- § Collecting of data in Form-2 through door-to-door visits by the enumerators at least 7-10 days ahead of schedules set for photograph-taking. Keeping detailed records of seriously ill and physically or mentally challenged people in registrars.
- § Handing over the collected data to the supervisors and scrutinizing the data received by the supervisors
- § Handing the scrutinized data by the supervisors to the AROs and upon scrutiny by the AROs. compiling the data in accordance to areas
- § Setting up voter registration centres and Upazila/ Thana server stations with assistance from army
- § Handing over the registration forms to the registration-centre team leaders by the AROs.
- § Informing AROs about the dates, time and numbers by the team leaders for photograph-taking. Passing the information to enumerators through supervisors by the AROs
- § By distributing chits/slips, enumerators inform the voters about time, dates and names of the centres for photographs-taking
- § Making all arrangements ready at the centres for photograph-taking

Last Stage

- § Making the registration centres and server stations operational
- § Procuring and setting up the laptops, webcams, finger-print scanners, photocopy machines, generators etc

Second Phase: Re-scrutinizing the Forms

- § Obtaining and scrutinizing forms at registration centres
- § Serializing the forms in laptops
- § Making entries of the forms in logbooks

Third Phase: Data Collection and Identity Scrutiny at Reg. Centres

- § Voters visiting the centres and handing over the slips to persons on duty
- § Collecting respective form and reaching out to the data entry operators
- § Identifying the voters by scrutinizers present at the centres
- § Making entries of data in the laptop (unless already entries are made) by the data entry operators
- § Taking of photographs, finger prints, signatures and handing over the receipts
- § Completing of any incomplete entries by the data entry operators
- § Daily handover of data in laptops to the team leaders and transfer the same through them to the upazila-level server stations

Fourth Phase: Registration of Physically Challenged, Jail Inmates, Missed-out & Ailing People

- § Identifying and informing about the voters missed out the registration
- § Registering the missed-out voters following the process described in Third Phase

- § Completing the registration of the physically challenged and seriously ill people by door-to-door visits (in last three days)
- § Informing the team leaders about the data of physically challenged and seriously ill people and transferring the data to upazila servers through them
- § Collecting data of jail inmates under special arrangements. Completing the registration process by visiting jails and taking the eligible inmates' photographs, fingerprints and signatures

Fifth Phase: Data Processing at Upazila Sewers

- § Sending the data of jail inmates to concerned voter areas and entry those into computers
- § Processing all data at upazila servers
- § Scrutinizing and improving the standard of data servers
- § Matching the data preserved at servers
- § Identifying the duplicate voters and informing the team leaders
- § Correcting the errors
- § Preparing the draft national ID cards and exhibiting the same
- § Correcting the errors in draft national ID cards
- § Preparing the national ID cards and distribution

Sixth Phase: Draft Voters List Printing and Finalizing

- § Preparing draft voters' list following Form-1
- § Exhibiting the draft voters' list
- § Accepting objections on draft voters' list
- § Hearing on the objections and ordering of corrections by revising authority
- § Correcting the errors in draft voters' list in accordance to such orders
- § Preparing the final voters' list
- § Authenticating the final voters' list by registration officer

5.1.5 Political Parties

Following political parties fielded their candidates in the Parliamentary Election 2008:

List of Political Parties

S.No.	Party
1	Islamic Front Bangladesh
2	Islamic Movement Bangladesh
3	Islami Oikya Jote
4	United Citizens Movement
5	Krishak Shramik Janata League
6	Democratic Party
7	People's Front
8	Gano Forum
9	Jamaat-e-Ulama Islam Bangladesh
10	Zaker Party

11	National Democratic Party
12	Jatiya Party
13	Jatiya Party-JP
14	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-Jasad
15	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-JSD
16	National People's Party
17	Progressive Democratic Party
18	Freedom Party
19	Bangladesh Awami League
20	Bangladesh Islamic Front
21	Bangladesh Kalayan Party
22	Bangladesh Khilafat Andolan
23	Bangladesh Khilafat Majlis
24	Bangladesh Jatiya Party
25	Bangladesh Jatiya Party-BJP
26	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
27	Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami
28	Bangladesh Tarikat Federation
29	Bangladesh National Awami Party
30	Bangladesh National Awami Party-Bangladesh NAP
31	Bangladesh Muslim League
32	Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal
33	Workers Party of Bangladesh
34	Communist Party of Bangladesh
35	Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh
36	Bangladesher Samayabadi Dal (ML)
37	Bikalapdhara Bangladesh
38	Liberal Democratic Party

Source: Election Commission of Bangladesh

5.1.6 Media

Media enjoyed a reasonable degree of freedom of expression, with no reported instances of intimidation or violence against journalists during the campaign as Rule 5 and 6 of Emergency Power Rules restricting freedoms of expression were repealed on November 3 and on 17 December the State of Emergency was fully lifted.

For the first time in Bangladesh, a draft **a Code of Conduct for the Mass Media** was made public on 11 November by the Chief Election Commissioner. Following discussion, a special

committee was formed to finalise the Draft Code of Conduct for the Media. However, the committee failed to give its report on time. On 5 December 2008, after a discussion with the committee, the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) announced that there would be no Code of Conduct for the Media in time for the 29 December Parliamentary elections.

CEC considered media policy to be a politically sensitive matter and determined that decisions regarding a Code of Conduct for the mass media should be made by the elected government. Guidelines for state-owned television and radio were issued on December 11 by Ministry of Information. According to this, they were required to provide equitable free air time to the political parties contesting the elections. The guidelines provided for all registered political parties to be entitled to broadcasting and telecasting facilities in the state-owned media during the general elections according to the principles and guidelines prescribed by the Bangladesh Election Commission.

5.1.7 Security & Violence

No incident of violence was reported before elections. Campaigning continued in a peaceful environment. Although the heads of two main political parties i.e., AL and BNP, had stated threats to their lives but the campaigning process remained relatively peaceful.

5.2 Women & Electoral Processes

5.2.1 Party-wise Women Contestants

In the parliamentary elections of 2008, apart from two leading females Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, a crop of female leaders from different political parties emerged as strong candidates of their constituencies. As compared to 2001 general elections in which 38 women contested from 48 constituencies, the number increased by 54 women contestants on 55 seats in 2008 elections. Moreover, besides elected women parliaments, out of 345 total seats there are 45 reserved seats for women in the legislature.

Party-wise Women Contestants

No.	Political Party	Number of Female Candidates
1	Awami League	17
2	BNP	13
3	Jatiya Party	4
4	Gono Forum	5
5	Bikalpadhara Bangladesh	4
6	Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal	1
7	National People's Party	1
8	Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal	1
9	Bangladesh Krishak Sarmik Janata League	2
9	Independent Candidates	6
	Total	54

5.2.2. Women Contestant and their Constituencies

These women contestants had strong positions in their constituencies and gave tough times to their opponents in the political fight. In Chandpur-3, Dipu Moni, AL's women affairs secretary and

daughter of language movement veteran Mohammad Abdul Wadud challenged to strong BNP candidate GM Fazlul Haque who won the last two parliamentary polls from the constituency.

Similarly, former student leader Shirin Sultana contested as the BNP candidate in Dhaka-9 against influential AL leader Saber Hossain Chowdhury. Saber won the 1996 election in the constituency while Shirin was in an electoral race for the first time.

Another new comer in parliamentary polls, the legendary actress Sara Begum Kobori came into discussion by creating a good image against her BNP nominated industrialist male counterpart (Shah Alam) in Narayganj-4. In Rangamati, voters observed a fight between well-educated Dr Alo Rani Aich of Bikalpadhara and Moitree Chakma of BNP.

Sagufta Yasmin and Meher Afroze Chumki of AL were elected members of parliament from reserve seats in 1996. Sagufta contested the last parliamentary polls but was defeated whereas; Sanjida Khanam came into limelight by playing a vital role as Hasina's lawyer after promulgation of the state of emergency. JP leader Rowshan Ershad contested in the election from Gaibandha-5 and Mymensingh-4 while Momotaj Iqbal from Sunamganj-4.

Khaleida Zia and Hasina Wajid contested on 3 seats each. Rawshan Ershad contested on two seats. Farida Yasmeen contested on 2 seats as well on a party ticket and as independent. The constituency based list of women contestant is as follows:

Constituency wise List of Women Contestants for Election 2008			
Division	Districts	Constituency No.	Women Contested Candidate
Barisal Division	Barisal	Barisal 2	Sayma Jalil (BDB)
		Barisal 3	Selima Rahman (BNP)
	Jhalakati	Jhalakati 2	Israt Sultana Elen Bhutto (BNP)
Chitagong Division	Brahmanbaria	Brahmanbaria 5	Sabara Begum (BDP)
	Comilla	Comilla 4	Mazeda Ahsan Munshi (BNP)
		Comilla 5	Sajeda Arif (Ind)
	Cox's Bazar	Cox's Bazar 1	Hasina Ahmed (BNP)
		Cox's Bazar 4	Shahin Akhter (Ind).
	Chandpur	Chandpur 3	Dipu Moni (AL)
	Feni	Feni 1	Khaleida Zia (BNP)
	Noakhali	Noakhali 3	Lutfunahar Munni (AL)
		Noakhali 6	Ayesha Ferdous (Ind),
	Rangamati	Rangamati 1	Maitri Chakma (BNP)
Alo Rani Aich (BDB)			
Dhaka Division	Dhaka	Dhaka 4	Sanjida Khanam (AL)
		Dhaka 5	Nazma Aktar (BKSJL),
		Dhaka 7	Sahida Amir (GF)
			Azmeri Begum Chhanda (BDB)
		Dhaka 8	Nasrin Anwar (Ind)
		Dhaka 9	Juleka Haque Mridha (GF)
Shirin Sultana (BNP)			

		Dhaka 11	Tahera Begum Jolly (BSD)
		Dhaka 12	Nurun Nahar Habib (GF)
		Dhaka 14	Ferdousi Sultan (GF)
		Dhaka 18	Sahara Khatun (AL)
		Dhaka 19	Lina Chakrabarti (Bangladesh Communist Party)
	Faridpur	Faridpur 2	Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury (AL)
			Shama Obaid (BNP)
	Gazipur	Faridpur 4	Nilufar Zafarullah (AL)
		Gazipur 1	Salma Rahman (NPP),
		Gazipur 4	Farida Yasmin (Ind),
		Gazipur 5	Meher Afroz Chumki (AL)
	Jamalpur	Jamalpur 1	Shahida Akter Rita (BNP)
	Gopalganj	Gopalganj 3	Sheikh Hasina (AL)
	Manikganj	Manikganj 2	Afroja Khan Rita (BNP)
	Madaripur	Madaripur 2	Helen Zerine Khan (BNP)
	Munshiganj	Munshiganj 2	Shagupta Yasmin Emili (AL)
		Munshiganj 3	Nazmunnahar Baby (JP),
	Mymensingh	Mymensingh 4	Rawshan Ershad (JP)
	Netrakona	Netrakona 4	Rebeka Momin (AL)
	Narayanganj	Narayanganj 4	Shara Begum Kabari (AL)
	Narsingdi	Narsingdi 5	Farida Yasmin (GF).
	Sherpur	Sherpur 2	Matia Chowdhury (AL)
		Tangail 2	Khaleda Habib (BKSJL)
Khulna Division	Bagerhat	Bagerhat 1	Sheikh Hasina (AL)
		Bagerhat 3	Habibun Nahar Khaleque (AL)
		Jhenaidah 2	Rehana Aktar Hira (JSD)
		Kushtia 4	Sultana Tarun (AL)
		Khulna 3	Begum Munnujan Sufian (AL)
Rajshahi Division	Bogra	Bogra 6	Khaleda Zia (BNP)
		Bogra 7	
	Gaibandha	Gaibandha 2	Mahbub Ara Guinea (AL)
		Gaibandha 5	Rawshan Ershad (JP)
	Natore	Natore 2	Sabina Yasmin Chhabi
	Ranpur	Ranpur 6	Sheikh Hasina (AL)
	Sirajganj	Sirajganj 2	Jannat ara Henry (AL)
Romana Mahmud			
Thakurgaon	Thakurgaon 2	Shirin Aktar Bani (Ind)	
Sylhet Division		Sunamganj 4	Begum Momtaj Iqbal (JP)
		Sylhet 4	Nasrin R Karim (JP)

5.2.3 Women Contestant as Male Family Member Become Ineligible

However, the selection of **women candidates** by two leading parties the *Awami League* (AL) and BNP showed that among the nominated candidates a few of these females were those **whose husbands became ineligible** for being convicted in different corruption and criminal cases. Sabina

Yasmin, Rumana Mahmud, Majeda Ahsan and Hasina Ahmed got nomination after their husbands who were BNP lawmakers convicted by the court and could not qualify for the poll.

On the other hand, the **AL nominated** Nilufar Zafarullah in Faridpur-4 as her husband AL Presidium member Mohammad Zafarullah couldn't contest the polls because of conviction. AL candidate Habibunnahar is the wife of Khulna Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaleque and Rebeka Momin is the wife of late AL leader Abdul Momin. Begum Monnujan Sufian is a veteran labour leader. The AL also endorsed independent candidate Ayesha Ferdous of Noakhali-6 as her husband Mohammad Ali was declared unfit by the returning officer.

5.2.4. Political Party Manifestos and Women

AL commitment to women as it per its manifesto was, 'To ensure women empowerment and equality, women development policy, formulated by AL in 1997, will be revived. The number of reserved seats for women in the parliament will be increased to 100. Necessary measures will be taken for appointment of women in senior posts. Strictest legal measures will be taken to stop oppression on women. Discriminatory laws against interests of women will be amended.' AL pledged for reservation of 100 seats in the parliament for women through direct voting.

BNP manifesto included issues such as providing credit to women entrepreneurs, training on mother and child health, family planning, environment and agriculture, strengthen the rules and laws regarding to anti-dowry, acid throwing, women and children trafficking, separate public toilet for women in Dhaka and other major cities and create environment for participation of more women in the parliament and politics. BNP didn't make any statement on women development policy.

As per the election manifesto of **JP**, participation of women in the government and party's different committees would be increased by 30 per cent within next 10 years.

Women rights activists criticized major political parties for ignoring the issues relating to gender discrimination. They said the women as political leaders were poorly represented in the nomination process and due preferences to the women issues for bringing them to the forefront of the society, economy and politics had not been given in any of the elections manifestoes presented by major parties. They remained dissatisfied with the election manifestoes of different political parties on the issue of empowerment of women as it was stated to be lip servicing, to ward criticism instead of real term women's emancipation.

5.2.5 Women Voters

Women voters for the first time in the country's history outnumber men according to the new voters' roll for the ninth parliamentary elections. The number of total voters were 8,10,58,698. Out of them 4,12,36,149 were women and 3,98,22,549 men - the former outnumbering the latter by 14,13,600.

5.2.6 Reserved Seats for Women

Till the 7th Parliamentary Election there were 30 seats reserved for women who were elected by the directly elected Members. With the exception of the first Parliament, that had 15 reserved seats for women, and the fourth Parliament, which had no such reservation. In the 8th Parliament the Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act, 2004 was passed by the Parliament on May 2004 by which the following provision was inserted in the constitution of Bangladesh:

Art. 65(3) "Until the dissolution of Parliament occurring next after the expiration of the period of ten years beginning from the date of the first meeting of the Parliament next after the Parliament in existence at the time of the commencement of the Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act. 2004,

there shall be reserved forty five seats exclusively for women members and they will be elected by the aforesaid members in accordance with law on the basis of procedure of proportional representation in the Parliament through single transferable vote:".

This reservation of seats for women did not disqualify them from being candidates in the general election.

CHAPTER 6

Election Day Report⁴

6.1 Voter Turnout

On the basis of comprehensive election observation by range of observers, the Ninth Parliamentary Elections held on December 29, 2008 are rated to be credible elections, consistent with international standards of freedom, fairness, and transparency.

The voter turnout of 80 percent (81 million eligible voters) was the highest in the history of Bangladeshi elections. The voter participation and enthusiasm was commendable. The voter turnout, estimated at 87 percent, is exceptionally high by international standards, and demonstrates that citizens attach great importance to parliamentary democracy.



Women voters and elected women candidates both was high that is substantiated by observation of long queues of women voters across the country, and the record number of women Members of Parliament elected. There has been a high voter turnout by women at recent national and local elections – between 75% and 85% – and increasing numbers of women were standing as candidates in local councils.

The *ethnic and religious minority communities* that faced significant threat and incidence of violence in the 2001 parliamentary election voted in large number and generally felt very secure in casting their votes. In addition, there was first-ever electoral participation of the Bihari people.

6.2 Role of Bangladesh Election Commission

As per a national public perception research under taken by EWG, public trust and confidence in the BEC stood at 76 percent on the eve of the election—33 percent higher than a similar poll conducted in 2006. Notable achievements of the BEC that contributed to the quality and integrity of the elections include the first national application of the milestone electoral roll with photographs. The new electoral roll virtually eliminated the risk and incidence of electoral fraud at the polling booth—as reflected by the low incidence of tendered or challenged ballots noted by EWG observers across the country. Electoral law reforms undertaken, together with voter and civic education materials produced and disseminated, by BEC further enhanced the quality of the election and contributed to greater voter knowledge and engagement in the electoral process.

Observers indicated minor administrative irregularities and incidents of a kind that were to be expected in administering elections for over 81 million voters in 299 constituencies, over 35,000 polling centers, and nearly 180,000 polling booths. The new administrative systems and procedures that in broad application contributed to the high quality of the election were certain to face certain challenges in their first-time application. The minor Election Day irregularities and

⁴ WPAF received election observation permission on the eve of the election hence logistically a team from the Secretariat, i.e. TR, could not proceed. However, WPAF country Chapter Bangladesh under Democracy Watch under took the Election day observation independently as well as being part of the Election Working Group. This section has been developed by the help of EU report, EWG report and media reports and is primarily dependent on secondary source data.

incidents observed in different polling centers had no impact on the overall quality and credibility of the election.

6.3 Preparations for Opening the Polls

Election officials were generally well prepared to complete opening procedures in polling centers and individual polling booths across the country. Transparent ballot boxes, voter lists, ballot papers, indelible ink, and other essential materials reached individual polling centers and booths in good time. With the exception of minor variations noted in isolated cases, election officials followed correct procedures in sealing ballot boxes and setting up the polling booths. In some cases the opening of polling booths was delayed beyond the specified 0800 start time as preparatory tasks were completed or polling agents (party representatives) arrived late, but delays of this kind had no impact on the overall quality of the polling process. Polling agents were present in large numbers in polling booths across the country, with most adequately prepared for their assignments. In some cases, polling agents were permitted to enter the polling center without being checked to confirm their identity and accreditation, while some polling agents did not wear identifying badges.

In a few isolated cases, election officials sought to expedite busy Election Day duties by completing envelopes and observer and polling agent witness lists on the evening prior to the election. Some officials took corrective measures after learning that these time-saving actions were inconsistent with good practice.

6.4 Polling Process

The polling process between the 0800 opening of polling booths 1600 closing set a consistently high standard across the country. While no major problems affected the overall quality of the polling process, EWG observers noted certain issues that may be remedied in future elections:

- § ***Challenges and delays in locating polling booths and voter names on the voter list:*** In many polling centers—especially those that operated in large school facilities with numerous polling booths on multiple levels—voters faced challenges and time delays in locating their designated polling booths and finding their names on the electoral rolls. Voter names were listed by serial number rather than alphabetically. The provision of chits with registration details by political parties expedited the process in most polling centers, but in many cases considerable time and effort was needed for voters to confirm their polling booth, locate their names on the voters list, verify their identity, and complete the voting process.
- § ***Long voter queues:*** Many polling centers experienced long queues during peak voting hours. While most men and women voters were content to stand patiently in long lines to cast their votes, in some cases voters discouraged by the long wait left the polling center without voting.
- § ***Voting patterns:*** Some observers reported a striking variation from past elections, when voters who lacked confidence in earlier national electoral rolls would arrive at the polling center early in the morning to cast their vote with the aim of reducing the risk of identity theft. Public confidence in the integrity of the electoral roll with photographs prompted voters to take a more leisurely approach in visiting polling centers later on Election Day.
- § ***Application of national ID cards:*** Inconsistencies were observed in the application of national ID cards, which technically were not required to establish a voter's identity. While most election officials followed the correct procedures of applying the voters list with photographs as proof of identity, some insisted on the national ID card as proof.

- § ***Individuals missing from the voters list:*** Some observers noted isolated cases in which voters held a voter registration chit but could not locate their names on the voters list. In some cases, those turned away from the polling center without voting were upset and protested vigorously.
- § ***Tendered ballots or challenges:*** As noted previously, there were few instances of tendered ballots cast or challenges, which affirmed the integrity of the electoral roll with photographs. EWG observers reported a few cases in which voters claimed to have discovered on arrival at the polls that their vote had already been cast.
- § ***Ballot papers:*** Some voters were confused by the compact size of the ballot paper and sought clarification from election officials on whether to place the seal on the party symbol or party name section of the ballot paper. Some voters were confused by the double-sided format and thinness of ballot papers, while others struggled to fold the ballots in the specified manner in the absence of clear instructions.
- § ***Voter privacy:*** Polling station officials were left to their own ingenuity and available materials in preparing screened areas in which voters could cast their votes in private. While the overall quality of arrangements was satisfactory, the privacy afforded varied significantly between rudimentary privacy screens made of light fabric and more substantial screens.
- § ***Translucent ballot boxes:*** While the newly introduced translucent ballot boxes generally worked very effectively, observers noted in some cases that double-sided ballot papers pressed against the side of the box could be clearly read as a vote for a particular political party.
- § ***Placement of ballot boxes:*** In most cases, election official placed ballot boxes in prominent locations that were easily visible to polling station officials, party poll agents, and election observers; however, in some cases the ballot box was placed in a less prominent location.
- § ***Voters in the queue at poll closing time:*** With few exceptions, election officials permitted voters who were in the queue by the 1600 closing time to complete the polling process. In some cases, election officials took initiative to reduce the wait for those in line by dividing the voter list in half and creating two shorter lines.
- § ***Election observers and party agents:*** While Election observers were not permitted to observe the polls in isolated circumstances, in most polling centers election observers and polling agents were permitted to observe the polling process.
- § ***Finger marked with ink:*** The indelible ink markers used to identify voters generally worked well; however, the ink could be removed quite easily. In some instances, observers reported that the markers dried out and had to be replaced.
- § ***Names and numbers of voters called out clearly:*** Polling officials were generally well informed of their administrative duties, including clearly calling out the name and number of voters and stamping ballot papers.

6.5 Security Environment Between Polling Centers

The mobile election observers evaluated the security environment between polling centers. They reported that the intra-center security environment was generally acceptable, but noted a few isolated problems:

- § ***Election campaign posters displayed within 400 yards of polling centers:*** In several cases nationwide candidate campaign posters were observed hanging within 400 yards of polling centers in contravention of BEC guidelines.
- § ***Instances of illegal Election Day campaigning observed:*** EWG observers noted a series of unrelated incidents around the country in which candidate loyalists engaged in obvious or discrete campaigning on Election Day in contravention of BEC guidelines.
- § ***Voter intimidation or denial of access to polling centers:*** While isolated incidents of voter intimidation or denial of access to polling centers were reported—particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, there was no evidence of any widespread effort to intimidate voters or deny them access to polling centers.
- § ***Candidate arrangement of transport or refreshment for voters:*** several cases of candidates or their supporters arranging rickshaw and other transportation of voters to or from polling centers and providing midday snacks and refreshments was observed.

6.6 Security Environment at Polling Centers

The security environment at polling centers was significantly improved from previous parliamentary elections. Minor incidents of intimidation were noted by EWG observers, but these only escalated to violence in rare occasions. Voters expressed confidence in the security of polling centers and adjacent areas. Of particular significance, members of ethnic and religious minority communities that have historically faced particular security challenges expressed confidence in casting their votes without fear, intimidation, or pressure. Law enforcement officials present in polling centers and polling booths generally discharged their security functions in a neutral manner.

Several minor incidents of violence involving clashes between rival political factions were reported. In some cases, the disruption was sufficient to prompt election officials to suspend polling until law enforcement officials restrained or otherwise dispersed those involved in violence.

6.7 Accessibility

Observers found most polling centers and individual booths to be accessible to voters of all ages and mobility levels. The widespread designation of schools as voting centers ensured convenient and secure central access in all but the most remote communities. Issues noted for future improvement include:

- § ***Inadequate arrangements for polling center access by elderly or women voters:*** The efficiency of arrangements for polling center access varied among different centers. In the case of large polling centers in urban schools, multiple levels and a labyrinth of narrow corridors posed access challenges for elderly and disabled voters and pregnant women and resulted in significant crowding at peak times. While election officials and voters were generally respectful of voters with special assistance needs, future elections will benefit from better arrangements—as discussed in the recommendations section. Some polling centers had few windows and inadequate ventilation, while others had inadequate water supplies and sanitary facilities to support voters, election workers, polling agents, and observers for the day.
- § ***Inadequate guidance:*** While election officials and party agents were generally helpful in assisting or directing voters once they reached their designated polling booth, the voting

process was slowed by the absence of persons to provide directions at the entrance to polling centers.

6.8 Counting Procedures

Election officials were generally well prepared to complete the ballot counting procedures in polling centers, ensuring an efficient transition from voting hours to closing procedures and the counting process. Observers noted that in most cases polling agents of all political parties were permitted to observe the counting process, with no unauthorized persons allowed access to the counting center. The counting process was generally free from intimidation or threats, while in most cases election officials properly reconciled used, unused, and spoiled ballots and applied the same standards for determining valid and invalid ballots for all parties and completed the counting process with no objection or demand for recounting. Likewise, in most cases polling sheets were signed by the presiding officers and distributed to all polling agents, while observers were permitted to record the polling results posted by the presiding officer.

Periodic delays in the start of counting procedures: In some polling centers around the country counting procedures were delayed for some time following the closure of the polls. In some cases, the counting process began rather chaotically, with heated debate among polling officials and polling agents, but gradually settled into a more orderly procedure.

6.9 Results

6.9.1 *Overall Results for Parliament (Jatiya Sangsad)*

Overall Results

Alliance	Party	Votes	%	Seats
Grand Alliance	Bangladesh Awami League	33,887,451	49.00%	230
	Jitiya Party	4,867,377	7.00%	27
	Jitiya Samajtantrik Dal	429,773	0.60%	3
	Workers Party of Bangladesh	214,440	0.30%	2
	Liberal Democratic Party	161,372	0.20%	1
Four Party Alliance	Bangladesh Nationalist Party	22,963,836	33.20%	30
	Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh	3,186,384	4.60%	2
	Bangladesh Jatiya Party	95,158	0.10%	1
Independents and others		3,366,858	4.90%	4
Total		69,172,649	99.99%	300

6.9.2 Results of Directly Elected Women

List of Women Winners on Direct Seats

Constituency	Women Contested Candidate	Votes Secured	Number of Male Candidates in the Constituency	Number of Female Candidates in the Constituency
Awami League (AL)				
Chandpur-3	Dr. Dipu Moni	134,836 (52%)	7	1
Dhaka-18	Sahara Khatun	213,332 (63%)	9	1
Faridpur-2	Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury	116,498 (60%)	1	2
Faridpur-4	Nilufar Zafarullah	157,491 (66%)	3	1
Gazipur-5	Meher Afroz Chumki	125,903 (61%)	8	1
Gopalganj-3	Sheikh Hasina	158,958 (97%)	2	1
Munshiganj-2	Shagupta Yasmin Emili	179,883 (83%)	2	1
Netrakona-4	Rebeka Momin	108,725 (53%)	1	1
Narayanganj-4	Shara Begum Kabari	141,075 (48%)	4	1
Sherpur-2	Motia Chowdhury	156,973 (67%)	3	1
Bagerhat-1	Sheikh Hasina	142,979 (68%)	3	1
Bagerhat-3	Habibun Nahar Khaleque	97,015 (58%)	3	1
Khulna-3	Begum Munnujan Sufian	74,678 (52%)	5	1
Kushtia-4	Sultana Tarun	131,620 (52%)	4	1
Gaibandha-2	Mahbub Ara Guinea	166,726 (75%)	5	1
Rangpur-6	Sheikh Hasina	170,542 (80%)	4	1
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)				
Cox's Bazar-1	Hasina Ahmed	156,512 (56%)	3	1
Feni-1	Khaleda Zia	114,482 (65%)	4	1
Bogra-6	Khaleda Zia	193,792 (71%)	4	1
Bogra-7	Khaleda Zia	232,761 (71%)	3	1
Sirajganj-2	Romana Mahmud	128,432 (48%)	8	2
Jatiya Party (JP)				
Sunamganj-4	Begum Momtaj Iqbal	123,883 (63%)	5	1

Total 18 women have been elected on 22 seats. Both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia won from three constituencies. 14 women of AL were elected from 16 seats. 3 women of BNP got elected from 5 constituencies and one women of JP made to the Parliament on direct seat. All women winners secured more than 50% of votes except for Shara Begum Kabari and Romana Mahmud who secured 48% of the total vote caste.

6.9.3 Women Elected on the Reserved Seats

The women on reserved seats are:

Women Elected on Reserved Seats	
1	Principal Noor Afroze Begum (Zyoti)
2	Ms. Abeda Chowdhury
3	Ms. Yasmin Ara Haque

4	Advocate Khaleda Panna
5	Advocate Ferdaus Akter Waheeda
6	Advocate Bilkis Akhter Jahan Sheer
7	Advocate Rina Parvin
8	Ms. Kazi Sahera Anwara Shammi Sheer
9	Ms. Khondaker Nurjahan Yesmin Bulbul
10	Ms. Khaleda Rabbani
11	Ms.Chaman Ara
12	Ms. Jahan Panna
13	Ms. Tasmin Rana
14	Ms. Nuri Ara Safa
15	Ms. Bilkiss Islam
16	Begum Roji Kabir
17	Begum Shamsun Nahar Khawja Ahsan Ullah
18	Ms. Rowshan Ara Farid
19	Ms. Rabeya Chowdhury
20	Ms. Raihan Akhter Banu
21	Ms. Rahana Akther Ranu
22	Ms. Rokeya Ahmed Lucky
23	Ms. Shahria Akhter Hossain
24	Ms. Shahana Rahman (Rani)
25	Ms. Sarwari Rahman
26	Ms. Sultana Ahamed
27	Ms. Selima Rahman
28	Syeda Nargis Ali
29	Ms Hasne Ara Gias (Daisy)
30	Ms. Helen Jerin Khan
31	Dr. Amena Begum
32	Ms. Shanara Begum
33	Ms. Sultana Razia
34	Ms. Merina Rahman
35	Syeda Razia Faiz
36	Ms. Navila Chowdhury
37	Ms. Khodeza Imdad Lata
38	Ms. Newaz Halima Arali,
39	Fahima Hossain Jubly
40	Rasheda Begum Hira
41	Ms. Razina Islam
42	Symun Begum
43	Rokeya Begum
44	Naima Sultana
45	Begom Noor-E-Hasasna Lili

[Source: Cabinet Division – Government of Bangladesh]

CHAPTER 7

Post-Election Scenario

7.1 Women in Cabinet

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed appointed women for the first time to Head the Home and Foreign Ministries. The 38-member cabinet (initially 31 ministers sworn-in but latterly 7 more ministers have been appointed) comprises five women in total, including the 61-year-old Prime Minister **Sheikh Hasina** herself, who is taking office of the impoverished country for the second time. **Dipu Moni**, a doctor and first-time MP who was active in the party's women's wing, was named the country's first female Foreign Minister. **Sahara Khatan**, a lawyer, was given the Home Ministry portfolio. **Motia Chowdhury** returned to the Agriculture Ministry. She headed in Sheikh Hasina's previous administration. **Munnujan Sufian**, a newcomer to politics, was made a State Minister.

Members of Cabinet & their Portfolios

Name of the Members	Portfolio
Sheikh Hasina Prime Minister	Armed Forces Division Cabinet Division M/O. Power, Energy & Mineral Resources : a) Power Division b) Power and Mineral Resources Division M/O. Establishment M/O. Housing and Public Works M/O. Defence M/O. Religious Affairs M/O. Women & Children Affairs
<i>Ministers</i>	
Abul Maal Abdul Muhit	M/O. Finance a) Finance Division b) Economic Relations Division c) Internal Resources Division
Begum Motia Chowdhury	M/O. Agriculture
Abdul Latif Siddiqui	M/O. Textile and Jute
Barrister Shafiq Ahmed	M/O. Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs a) National Parliament Secretariat
Air Vice Marshal (rtd) AK Khandoker	M/O. Planning a) Planning Division b) Implementation Monitoring & Evaluation Division
Razi Uddin Ahmed Razu	M/O. Posts and Telecommunications
Advocate Sahara Khatun	M/O. Home Affairs
Syed Ashraful Islam	M/O. Local Government and Rural Development & Co-operatives a) Local Govt. Division b) Rural Development & Co-operatives Division
Engineer Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain	M/O. Labour and Employment M/O. Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment
Rezaul Karim Hira	M/O. Land
Abul Kalam Azad	M/O. Information M/O. Cultural Affairs
Enamul Huq Mostafa Shaheed	M/O. Social Welfare

Dilip Barua	M/O. Industries
Ramesh Chandra Sen	M/O. Water Resources
GM Quader	M/O. Civil Aviation and Tourism
Lt. Col. (Retd) Faruq Khan	M/O. Commerce
Syed Abul Hossain	M/O. Communications a) Roads & Railway Division b) Bridge Division
Dr. Abdur Razzak	M/O. Food and Disaster Management
Dr. Afsarul Amin	M/O. Shipping
Dr. A.F.M Ruhul Huq	M/O. Health and Family Welfare
Dr. Dipu Moni	M/O. Foreign Affairs
Nurul Islam Nahid	M/O. Education M/O. Primary and Mass Education
Abdul Latif Biswash	M/O. Fisheries and Livestock
State Ministers	
Advocate Mostafizur Rahman	M/O. Forest and Environment
Captain (Retd) ABM Tazul Islam	M/O. Liberation War Affairs
Tanzim Ahmed Sohel Taz	M/O. Home Affairs
Architect Yafes Osman	M/O. Science and Information & Communication Technology
Dr. Hasan Mahmud	M/O. Foreign Affairs
Begum Munnuzan Sufian	M/O. Labour and Employment
Dipankar Talukdar	M/O. Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs
Ahad Ali Sarker	M/O. Youth and Sports
Advocate Shamsul Haque Tuku	M/O. Power, Energy & Mineral Resources a) Power Division b) Power and Mineral Resources Division
Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan	M/O. Housing and Public Works
Md. Motahar Hossain	M/O. Primary and Mass Education
Advocate Jahangir Kabir Nanok	M/O. Local Govt., Rural Development & Co-operatives a) Local Govt. Division b) Rural Development & Co-operatives Division
Advocate Md. Quamrul Islam	M/O. Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs a) National Parliament Secretariat
Advocate Md. Shahjahan Miah	M/O. Religious Affairs

Source: Cabinet Division – Government of Bangladesh

7.2 Inaugural Session of Parliament

Bangladesh took another step in its return to democracy on January 25 when parliament convened for the first time since 2006, following two years of rule by an unelected military-backed interim government. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia led legislators from their respective parties and alliances to the sprawling parliament house, with outgoing speaker Jamiruddin Sircar presiding at the opening session.

Speaker and Deputy Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament: Advocate Abdul Hamid and Col (Retd) Shawkat Ali were unanimously elected Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the ninth parliament respectively in the inaugural session of the House. A lawyer by profession, Hamid has been involved in AL politics since the 1960s. He was elected the youngest ever member of the Pakistan National Assembly in 1970 at the age of 25. Hamid was also elected a member of parliament (MP) in 1973, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008 general elections on his party ticket. Shawkat, who will work as the

Deputy of Hamid, also has a long political career with experience of being the chairman and a member of many parliamentary committees. Shawkat, a freedom fighter, was first elected lawmaker of the second parliament in 1979 from Shariatpur-2 constituency, followed by his election as an MP in 1991, 1996, 2000 and 2008. He is also a listed Supreme Court lawyer.

7.3 Upazila Elections

Upazila polls were held on January 22 after 19 years of long gap. According to EC the polls were rigged and influenced widely. Originally, EC scheduled the local polls to precede the parliamentary election as it sought to avert the polls being influenced by the ruling party or alliance. It however had to give in to mounting pressure from the major political parties including AL and BNP, and rescheduled the elections for January 22.

Results in 18 upazilas were suspended due to allegations of irregularities. Initially results in 7 upazilas were cancelled but later on on January 27, the EC announced that it will have judicial enquiry into allegations of electoral irregularities in 11 more upazilas.

Over a half of the total 8,090 candidates in upazila parishad elections lost their security deposits due to dismal performances, and almost all of them did not get any major political party's backing. The results showed that most of the winning candidates who are now entitled to refunds of their security deposits, were also backed by either of the two major political parties – AL and BNP, although the elections were non-partisan according to the law. The electoral law stipulates that a candidate must secure a minimum of one-eighth of the total votes cast for a post, to get a refund of the security deposit made at the time of filing the application for candidacy.

7.4 Presidential Elections

Indirect Presidential Elections was to be held in Bangladesh on 16 February 2009 following the 2008 parliamentary election. This should have taken place by 5 September 2007, when Iajuddin Ahmed's term expired, but was postponed as an elected parliament was not there. AL nominated Zillur Rahman as its candidate for President, and he was expected to be elected at the parliamentary session. Rahman was the only candidate who submitted his papers by the nomination deadline of 9 February 2009, and as he did not withdraw by the withdrawal deadline of 11 February 2009, the Election Commission declared him elected. He was sworn in on 12 February.

CHAPTER 8



Analysis: Will there be a Change?

It is part of the Bangladesh Election Commission's (EC) annual "Historical" report, released in December 2008. It describes the process of the 9th Parliamentary elections, which were held on December 18, 2008.



Bangladesh Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina casts her ballot in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, on Dec. 29, 2008.

The **9th Parliamentary elections** organized by caretaker government were held with the highest voters' turnout and ended peacefully. Two hundred ninety-nine seats out of the 300 seats in Parliament were contested by 1555 candidates from 39 parties and independents. Before the elections, The expectations for Awami League to win were high, but not with a big margin. According to Election Commission statistics, 31 percent of over 81 million registered voters were fresh voters. This has been widely speculated as key to Awami League landslide win.

Women candidates have also come in substantial number and for the first time have been accorded pivotal positions in the Cabinet i.e. Foreign Office and Interior. This will definitely create a positive input for the upcoming local government elections.

Besides new voters, many senior Bangladeshis also desired a change with a view that the change will not only bring them hope, but also the development for the country and end to rampant corruption. Bangladesh was named the most corrupt country for five consecutive years by Transparency International. Out of the five years, four years were in BNP time. Since 1991, BNP and Awami League ruled Bangladesh alternatively. Khaleda Zia was prime minister from 1991-1996 and from 2001-2006, Sheikh Hasina was prime minister from 1996 to 2001.

Bangladesh politics is traditional, rhetoric and propaganda based with little scope for interaction with the leaders asking for accountability. The grass root activists and the general people have little to say in the decision making processes. However **motivational campaigns focusing youth and issue of corruption**. For example, Jagoree, a non-partisan platform for Bangladeshi youth, used facebook and blog to engage youth in a debate focusing political and



be informed and responsible

What are we? Image courtesy: [Jagoree](#). It ran a campaign called 'Amader Vote, Amader Kotha' (Our Vote, Our Voices).

With a penetration of 1% of the total population of 145 million, Internet is still not a media that reaches mass people. **The new generation of bloggers and facebook users tried to harness the power of the new media.** Bangla Blogging platforms like somewhere in, Sachalayatan, Amar Blog, Muktangon buzzed with election related posts - from constructive debates to mundane bickering of acrimony between political ideologies.

E-Bangladesh provided links to all the important news regarding Bangladesh election and posted analysis and breaking news from citizen journalists besides providing links to resources for the election including candidate lists and election manifestos of the parties. Its sister initiative, the Bangla Blogging platform [Amar Blog](#) provided election coverage in bangle language. A popular English language group blog [Unheard Voice](#) provided analysis and commentaries on the recent election.

The largest Bangla blogging platform somewhereinblog.net started a group blog on election in collaboration with the English language news paper *The New Age*. The news daily started an election portal to feature selected blog posts from the group blog and news/analysis from its daily newspaper publications. This was the first instance in the country where a major print media collaborated with a blog platform outside its management. Quite against the tide of the digital divide among the candidates, bloggers and journalist [Maskwaith Ahsan](#), who ran as a MP candidate in the Rajshahi -6 constituency, used [facebook](#) to run his campaign.

However, the traditional media still dictated in Bangladesh though some were alleged for biased reporting. The websites of the political parties were not interactive. Only a few out of thousands of candidates were seen using Internet in their campaign. On the other hand Bangladesh Election Commission had detailed information including voter list and candidate profiles besides all related election rules and guidelines on its web page.

Barring some isolated incidents, this **election has been able to set the standards and challenges for all future elections.** The people and the media were crying out loud against misrule for five 5 years (2001-2006) - but the alliance government ignored them. **Khaleda Zia's** plea for forgiveness for all the gaffes of her 5 years of governance was “too little, too late.” Later her defiance and allegation against the election fairness indicates that perhaps her plea for forgiveness was simply used as a gambit to gain voters' sympathy.

By rejecting the results, Khaleda appears to be virtually marginalized. It further appears that she and her party may be poised to lose big with the dismemberment of an already fractured party

one that began nearly three years ago with the formation of LDP under the leadership Col. Oli Ahmed and then the expulsion of the reformist group.

The **international observers and media** also state other wise:

“The process appears to have yielded a result that accurately reflects the will of Bangladeshi voters,” Constance Berry Newman, the head of a 65-people delegation from the International Republican Institute

“The voting Monday, which heralded Bangladesh's return to democracy after two years of military-backed rule, was the most peaceful in decades a stark contrast to the failed elections of 2007, which dissolved into street riots and prompted the emergency measures.” International Herald Tribune

For **Women Empowerment** of all types has two impacting levels i.e. personal and societal. Political empowerment is sum of all as it prolific and has the ability to not only change but effect and affects the dynamics of stakeholders from personal to societal level. In Bangladesh, the road to political empowerment demands overcoming socio-cultural constraints and working within socio-religious norms, availability of considerable financial resources and a political family. Hence, it is not a journey cut for a lone traveler but demands a holistic support mechanism.

The 2008 Elections bring out that loyalty to political mentor remain to be the driving principle from personal to political level for women contestants. The closer the alignment to the power base – individual and/or institutional – higher the chances of personified political visibility and success. The nomination of tickets by major political parties to women contestants is one example of the argument.

The analysis brings out that status of a woman with in the political party is not solely determined not by the contribution of women as a party worker over a period of time but from which family one belongs to and/or whose protégé one is perceived to be. The loyalty factor and association of a political house hold is a critical combination which has the potential to over come all types of socio-cultural-religious obstacles by having the “influence factor” at personal and family level. The allocation of ticket itself is reflective of the political weight of the political family as women of that house were accommodated when men became ineligible.

Women and electoral political issue did not merit substantive discussions in media but remained ornamental. The media did not contribute to the projection of political novices. On an over all basis the observation brings out, that at personal level it remains an uphill struggle for elected women.

The exclusive observation of WCC is an important tool to observe and documents the women in politics beyond numbers by establishing range of baselines and projection of trends for policy and legislative reforms. It can help identify the gaps at personal, political, electoral and societal level but with an opportunity to plug the same by way of mainstreaming and not pushing it further under exclusivity of “women only.” The efforts that contribute to credible observation, comparison and documentation are a structured feedback not only for policy formulation but for an influencing mechanism to ensure that stakeholders stay true to their commitments.

AWAMI League chief Sheikh Hasina's promised change⁵ for a better Bangladesh that has rekindled hopes among the impoverished masses, who gave her party 229 seats in the 300 member parliament. By asking her party's winners to forsake noisy and boisterous revelry through street processions, Hasina has shown the composure and acuity expected of a leader.

⁵ Triumph of hope and change by DrAbdullah A. Dewan, in The Daily Star, Bangladesh

With her party's overwhelming victory, the burden of responsibility is also overwhelming. In order to execute those responsibilities, Hasina set in motion the process of inclusiveness and responsibility sharing when she declared that her government would work with the opposition's participation.

Bangladesh has a clear history of landslide victories in elections during the past six decades. One may recall such facts of landslides since the one in 1946 followed by in 1954, then 1970, 2001 and this time in 2008. It was not only the landslides fifth in record in 62 years but what also happened in victory each time due to fall out of the anti- incumbency factor. The 1946 factor was the colonial British and their native lackeys whom the common people wished to eliminate, in 1954 the anti-incumbency factor was the Muslim League, in 1970 the Dictator Ayub Khan, in 2001 the Awami League and this time in 2008 the BNP and to some extent the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh. Unusually raised hopes in all those cases of victories followed despair each time. In addition, the winners have been seen to ignore the defeated group. This time things look little different though but are facing resistance from the day one.

In the past, a party with absolute majority had shown intolerance of the opposition and resorted to reckless use of power by politicizing the state machinery. If BNP's debilitating defeat is any lesson, then there should be zero tolerance for any repeat of the mischief of the past. **The challenges to AL⁶** are not only many but complexed, intricate and sensitive. They had proposed in their manifesto to try the 'war criminals'. That is their commitment. Now they have to look for their mode to do it.

Further, the party has promised to fully secularize Bangladesh politics by reviving the 1972 Constitution and 'banning religion-based politics'. Could this be any simple task? The first hurdle is in annulment of the 5th Amendment of the Constitution. Should they attempt to do this by the brute force of majority, it would certainly create emotional outburst with Islamic religious fervor among the people not only among the 53% but may rise to 90% because, Islamic religious sentiment is extremely strong in Bangladesh. Further more, many Muslim countries may also take exception to it leading to multi-facet issues.

The common and overwhelmingly poor people who constitute over 50% of the 150 million people voted in the hope that they would get cheaper goods for bare sustenance; cheap fertilizer and more electricity, among others. Should they fail to deliver this bare minimum expectation, the swing may soon surface and be repeated as the extreme of pendulum.

The questions are: Why did people make this history? Why did 4-party alliance suddenly fall from "sublime to ridiculous"? Why and how did 14-party alliance get such a massive victory, which was even beyond their imagination? The simple answer is: it's a reflection of people's power. Analyst allocates **three reasons for this change**. First, the elections marked a resounding verdict for democracy. The last two years, Bangladesh was ruled by a military-led caretaker government. The care takers kept its crucial word of holding elections, but compromised over all governance with political machinations, judicial interference, and widespread human-rights abuses. A pre-election survey reported that 87% of voters thought that any elected administration, regardless of party, would govern better than the caretaker government. So, on election-day a huge number of citizens showed up to vote, and with extraordinary enthusiasm.

Second, the election delivered a landslide victory for the Awami League (AL), a centre-left party that promoted progressive policies and religious freedom. BNP, the centre-right party that won in 2001, was blamed to be marred with corruption and underhand deals that costed them politically

⁶ The post election sceneries by M.T. Hussain in the news paper the New Nation, Bangladesh

in 2008. Third, the vote was a decisive rejection of the BNP alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist party in the country. Their combined rule between 2001 and 2006 was marked by unprecedented violence and terrorism against progressives, leftists, cultural icons, and religious and ethnic minorities. Bangladeshis handed this rightwing alliance a thumping defeat in the election, with *Jamaat-e-Islami* in particular decimated.

Critical analysis shows that people did not vote for the 14-party alliance; they voted against massive corruptions and mismanagement of the BNP-led government. People were suffocated with sky-high price for daily necessities, massive corruptions, and various unaccepted mismanagements. The grievance against 4-party alliance mounted and finally reached to its extreme verge. Poverty-ridden farmers failed to get fertilizers even though they were ready to pay the high price. BNP cadres in this critical juncture took opportunities to become rich. Poor farmers were not only deprived, but also cheated and humiliated. Crisis of electricity added another fuel to their grievance. BNP-led alliance grossly failed to address these basic problems of people. People were thus waiting for a moment to punish the 4-party alliance.

The right moment was grabbed by the Awami League-led alliance. Shaikh Hasina promised to the nation that she would reduce the price of rice to 10 taka per KG, manage to provide free fertilizers to the farmers, and provide at least one employment in every family. One might have serious doubt whether these promises can actually be met in a country like Bangladesh; but it cannot be disputed that these promises captured the imagination of millions of people. Therefore, this election was less about the fight for idealism (secularism vs. nationalism) but more about the question of survival, basic necessities, and punishing the corrupted folks.

Despite having many notable achievements of the BNP-led government, they failed to focus on those due to the massive crackdown by the CTG. During the time of election, BNP as a party was massively disorganized and was not ready at all to face the election. Most of its leaders were in jail, and the onus of campaign was largely shouldered by Begum Khaleda Zia herself. She tried her best, but the overall climate was not in her favour. The news of her two sons' massive corruptions just few days before the election posed another massive blow in her campaign. The 14-party alliance got another momentum, and with the help of media they used it massively and perfectly.

For BNP and its alliance, the time has come to do self-assessment as to why this powerful alliance is what it is today. One key lesson is that change has settled in and people will no more forgive if any alliance/ party bluffs with them. The 14-party alliance should be proud of its achievement, but should keep its feet on ground as well as it faces humongous challenge to meet the promises it made; and if it fails, it has to embrace the same doom as 4-party alliance had.

Finally, the defeat for Islamism in Bangladesh did not come from western intervention, nor from suppression by authoritarian governments aided and equipped by the west. It came from an election, from mainly Muslim voters in a Muslim-majority country. The lesson for the international community is that it needs to support the democratic processes in Muslim countries, rather than cherry-pick winners and losers. Islamists increased their influence in Bangladesh since 1975 mainly under governments backed by the west. The BNP government and the caretaker government are also alleged for selling extremist threats to the west.

Return of democracy in Bangladesh made history: it demonstrated the futility of the west's conventional approach of fighting extremism as its proven that the democratic process only can bring change, regardless of who wins and who lose, because, people have power.

Annex 1

Code of Conduct for the National Parliamentary Election-2008 (Revised)

1. Candidates or representatives of the candidates will not be allowed to give any donation or payment to any institution or organisation in or outside of his or her constituency. Candidates will not be allowed to make any pledge either to the voters of any development works in future in the constituency.

But there is no bar to presenting any plan of the political parties relating to the national and local development
2. The political parties and candidates must inform the police and their opponents about the date, time and venue of their respective rallies and processions ahead of the programmes.
3. The political parties and candidates must inform the police about the time and venue of their rallies in advance so that the authorities can take necessary steps to ensure public movement and maintain law and order.
4. No public rally is allowed on any road, that disrupts the movement of people, without permission of the authorities.
5. It is prohibited that posters, leaflets or handbills will be posted overlaying the posters, leaflets of handbills of rival candidates.
6. No candidate or representative is allowed to put up posters, leaflets or handbills in the following places or transports:
 - a. Buildings or boundary walls of city corporation area.
 - b. Buildings or boundary walls of municipal area.
 - c. Government and local authorities buildings
 - d. Bus, Truck, Train, Steamer or any other transports.But, there is no bar to put up posters, leaflets and handbills on any other places.
7. Each candidate will be allowed to set up only one election camp in a union or ward. No election camp will be allowed to be set up on the roads or places for public use. Election camps should be simple, as far as possible; voters cannot be entertained with any sort of food or drinks in the camps.
8. Posters for election campaigns must be printed on country-made paper in black and white and cannot be more than 22"x18" in size. Candidates can use the photo of the party chief in the poster. But it must be a portrait, not any kind of photo where the party chief is seen leading a procession, or a programme or on prayer.
9. The size of the election symbol must be three meters in height, length and width.
10. All contenders will refrain from any sort of graffiti as a means of election campaign.
11. Candidates are not allowed to make any cap, shirt and t-shirt for election campaign.
12. Contenders will stay away from erecting any kind of gate or putting up any blockade on people's movement for election campaign.
13. Contenders may set up Pennnel for campaign, which do not exit 400 square feet.
14. All sorts of illuminations for election campaign are prohibited.

15. In the interest of maintaining law and order, no motor vehicles, including motor cycles, can be moved and no sort of firearms or explosives can be carried within the premises of polling centres; no government official or local influential persons can illegally intervene in election activities.
16. Contenders, political parties and representatives of the candidates are not allowed to use helicopter or any other air transport for election campaign. However, the chiefs of the political parties can travel by helicopter during election campaign, but not allowed to carry any banners, leaflets on the copter.
17. No political party or candidate can give any unpalatable or provocative statement and say anything which might hurt the sentiment of the followers of any religion.
18. Contenders are not allowed to start election campaign, three weeks before the voting date.
19. Neither a political party nor a contender is allowed to carry out campaign in any Mosque, Temple, Church or any other religious places. The election must not be influenced by money, weapons, muscle power or local influence.
20. Only the employees and officials engaged in election duties, rival candidates, polling agents, local and foreign election observers and voters will have access to the polling centres. No worker of the political parties or candidate will be allowed freedom of movement inside the polling centres. Only the polling agents, sitting in their fixed places, may perform their specific duties.

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