

STATEMENT OF HIS EXCELLENCY MR. SHIN SAKURAI
ON BEHALF OF JAPAN-BANGLADESH PARLIAMENTARIANS
ASSOCIATION
ELECTION OBSERVER GROUP
AT THE SONARGAON HOTEL
ON OCTOBER 3, 2001

At the invitation of the Caretaker Government and the Election Commission of Bangladesh. I led the Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentarians' Association Election Observer Group, that visited Bangladesh from September 30 to October 3, 2001 to observe voting and counting process during the Eighth Parliamentary Election held on October 1, 2001. This Election Observer Group, headed by myself (H.E Mr. Shin Sakurai, Vice-President of the Association and a Member of the House of Councilors), included Prof. Minoru O'uchi, Professor of Shumei University, Prof. Hirofumi Ando, Professor of Nihon University, and Dr. Mayumi Noguchi, Research Fellow, Institute of Developing Economy, and others.

This is the third time that the Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentarians' Association has sent an election observer group following the earlier election in 1991 and 1996; and the second time for me to lead the observer group, the first being in 1996.

During our stay in Bangladesh, we called on H.E. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. H.E. Justice Latifur Rahman, Chief Advisor of the Caretaker Government, Mr. M. A. Syed, Chief Election Commissioner, Mrs. Sheikh Hasina, President of the Bangladesh Awami League, and Begum Khaleda Zia, Chairperson of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

On the Election Day, we visited nineteen polling centers in ten constituencies in Dhaka, Gazipur, Norshingdi and Narayanganj, and observed closely the vote casting and counting process. We received a warm welcome from election officers as well as voters at all polling centers, and we could fulfill our observation mission smoothly without any interruption.

Although our observation was limited, we were very impressed with the scene, where both voting and counting were conducted in an orderly fashion, and also with the discipline maintained and enthusiasm evinced among election officers and voters. Police, Ansar, BDR's and the Armed Forces who were on duty at each polling center also operated in a well disciplined manner. We were further impressed with the cheerful cooperation and assistance among all those agents from main political parties, who overcome partisan interests and ensured the voting process was conducted in a smooth way.

There were reportedly a number of polling centers where voting was cancelled because of clashes between political party supporters. However, the number is insignificant; I believe, in view of the large number of polling centers, nearly thirty thousand, throughout Bangladesh.

As a result of our observation, we had a confident impression that this election, as a whole conducted in a free, fair, peaceful and orderly manner. Our attention was particularly drawn to the many women and young people who participated in this election in an active and orderly way. This leads me to believe that your country has a very bright future. I was also touched by the sincerity and integrity of the people of Bangladesh throughout our observation.

This election was the second conducted under the Non-party Caretaker Government system. We strongly hope that this election will further promote the democratic process in your country. Finally, we sincerely hope that the will of the people as reflected in this election, result will be fully respected, and the new government can be swiftly organized, and democracy is consolidated in accordance with the wishes of the people of Bangladesh.