



Bangladesh Election Commission
Election Commission Secretariat
Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka
www.ecs.gov.bd

No.ECS/PR.Dept/ Foreign Observer:N/17/2008/215

Dated, the 2nd November, 2008

Minutes of the meeting on facilitation of foreign observation of forthcoming elections held at the Bangladesh Election Commission on October, 28, 2008

A meeting was held on October 28, 2008 at the Election Commission Conference Room under the chairmanship of Dr. ATM Shamsul Huda, Chief Election Commissioner in connection with election observation by foreign observers. Election Commissioners Mr. Muhammad Sohul Hussain and Brigadier General (Retd) Sakhawat Hussain and senior officials of the concerned Ministries were also present. List of officials present at the meeting is given at Annex A.

2. Welcoming the participants, the chairman started the proceedings of the meeting. He emphasized the role of foreign election observers in ensuring free and fair elections. He mentioned that some organizations like the NDI and IRI have contacted him about election observation and enquired about formalities relating to obtaining visas and other related matters. There are also two categories of foreign observers, short term and long term. Short term observers mostly concentrate on observation during the poll day while long term observers cover pre-poll, polling and post-poll activities. The meeting then proceeded to discuss various issues as per agenda fixed for the meeting:

A. Guidelines for the Foreign Election Observers:

“Guidelines for the Foreign Election Observers” prepared by the Election Commission shall be reviewed, suitably amended and issued afresh. The revised Guidelines shall contain, among other things, an application form for foreign observers, procedures for obtaining visas, a code of conduct and other necessary information. The entire Guidelines along with the application form will be available on the website of the Commission (www.ecs.gov.bd) and all interested persons or organizations would be able to download it to meet their requirements. Ministry of Foreign Affairs will inform all its diplomatic missions abroad about the Guidelines and the website so that the Missions may advise the interested parties when they approach them for assistance.

B. Accreditation of Foreign Observers:

- I. Foreign observers intending to observe the forthcoming elections need to apply to the Commission in the prescribed form as given in the Guidelines. Filled out forms may be sent to the Commission either through e-mail (pro@ecs.gov.bd) or by fax (**880-2-9129773**). Local offices of foreign diplomatic missions or of regional groups or international organizations may forward the applications directly to the Commission by special messenger or mail.
- II. Applications received through e-mail or fax or locally shall be scrutinized by the Secretariat of the Commission and forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs for clearance with a simultaneous copy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ministry of Home Affairs shall convey its clearance directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under intimation to the Commission.

- III. Subject to clearance by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will instruct the concerned Mission abroad for issuing the necessary visas. In case of necessity, it may also instruct the Airport Immigration to issue “on arrival” visas.
- IV. Observers intending to travel from countries, where currently there are no Bangladeshi Missions, should send their application forms directly to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who shall then send these to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Election Commission for further necessary action.

C. Grant of Visa:

- I. Election observers will be granted tourist visas. The validity of visas for long term observers would be for two months while for short term observers the period would be three weeks.
- II. Immigration officials at the Zia International Airport would mark the “Election Observer” seal on the passports of the observers.
- III. Observers traveling from countries where Bangladesh has its diplomatic missions will have to obtain visas prior to their journey. However, in exceptional cases, “on arrival” visas may be arranged.
- IV. Observers traveling from countries where Bangladesh does not have any diplomatic mission will have to obtain their visas from the neighboring Bangladesh Missions or follow the procedure as detailed at BIV above.

D. Airport Help Desk:

An Airport Help Desk would be set up by Airport Immigration 10(ten) days prior to the actual date of polling for reception and assistance to incoming observers and journalists.

E. Observation Cell:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs would run an Observation Cell to coordinate with all concerned agencies for processing of visas and other related matters.

F. Foreign Journalists:

- I. Foreign journalists intending to cover the forthcoming polls would have to follow the same procedures for obtaining visas as in the case of the observers.
- II. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will open a Media Center with all modern facilities for transmitting news and messages by the foreign journalists.
- III. Upon arrival at the airport, the Airport Help Desk will arrange to establish their contact with the Media Cell who in its turn will contact the Election Commission for providing them with identification cards and stickers for vehicles and other necessary documents.

G. Security:

- I. Ministry of Home Affairs will instruct the concerned Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents of Police to provide the necessary security to the foreign observers and journalists during their visit to different polling stations of the country. The sponsoring organizations of the observers and journalists must provide their itinerary of visits well ahead of time to the Ministry of Home for ensuring the needed service. Bangladesh Government or the Election Commission will not be responsible for any mishap encountered by any such visitor who follows his own program.

- II. A list of all observers and foreign journalists will be sent to the Deputy Commissioners and Superintendents by the Election Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

H. Health Care:

Ministry of Health and Family Planning will alert all medical establishments under its control to provide the necessary health care to all visiting foreign observers and journalists should such occasions arise during their visit to different polling centers through out the country.

I. Miscellaneous:

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will send a budget estimate for setting up the media center to the Election Commission. The latter will then forward it to the Finance Division with its comments for its consideration and approval.

2. The chairman concluded the meeting with a vote of thanks to all participants.

Sd/-
(Dr. ATM Shamsul Huda)
Chief Election Commissioner

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Distribution:

1. Secretary, Ministry of Information, Dhaka.
2. Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka.
3. Additional Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Dhaka.
4. Principal Information Officer, Press Information Department, Dhaka.

C.C.

1. Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Affairs, Dhaka.
2. Director General, Department of Immigration and Passport, Dhaka.
3. Joint Secretaries (All), Election Commission Secretariat, Dhaka.
4. Deputy Secretary (Admin-1/Election/Law/General), Election Commission Secretariat, Dhaka.
5. Private Secretary to the Chief Election Commissioner (For kind information of Hon'ble Chief Election Commissioner).
5. Private Secretary to the Election Commissioners (For kind information of Hon'ble Election Commissioners).
6. Private Secretary to the Secretary, Election Commission Secretariat (For kind information of Secretary).
7. Local Diplomatic Missions/ Foreign Organisations.

(S. M. Asaduzzaman)
Public Relations Officer
Phone: 8114176

Annexure-A

Officers present in the meeting on facilitation of foreign observation of forthcoming
elections held at the Bangladesh Election Commission on October 28, 2008

1. Mr. Md. Humayun Kabir, Secretary, Election Commission Secretariat, Dhaka.
2. Mr. Jamil Osman, Secretary, Ministry of Information, Dhaka.
3. Mr. Md. Touhid Hossain, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dhaka.
4. Sheikh Abdur Rashid, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Dhaka.
5. Mr. Iftekhar Hossain, Principal Information Officer, Press Information Department, Dhaka.
6. Mr. Surat Kumar Sarkar, Senior Deputy Information Officer, PID, Dhaka.
7. Mr. S M Asaduzzaman, Public Relations Officer, Election Commission Secretariat, Dhaka.