



Conference of
**Election Management Bodies
of SAARC Member States**

Islamabad, September 8-9, 2011

Conference Report

Introduction

The 2-day Conference of Election Management Bodies (EMBs) of SAARC Member States was held in Islamabad on 8-9 September 2011. The Election Commission of Pakistan in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized the event, second in the series of moots on the subject. The maiden conference of SAARC EMBs was convened in Dhaka on May 29-30, 2010 to share knowledge on electoral issues of the region. That meeting had concluded with a strong commitment from all the delegations to continue to meet and progress towards the formation of a Forum of Election Commissions of SAARC Member States.

The conferences on the overarching theme of electoral reforms are being organized in a regional scenario when all the SAARC Member States have democratic governments. Though Pakistan during its national history saw interludes of democratic governments, the current democratic dispensation that began in 2008 is sustaining. The South Asian governments now hold elections for their national parliaments, representative bodies, and local governments and find themselves on a learning curve in regard to various issues related to electoral and legislative reforms, as well as election procedures. In this backdrop, the second conference held in Islamabad had added significance as it dealt with a range of key aspects of electoral processes. The event highlighted the importance of electoral process for strengthening democracy, governance, and ensuring sustainable, political stability. It was a useful occasion to share experiences and learn from best practices through the conduct of elections at various levels.

A centerpiece achievement of the conference was the adoption of a resolution for the establishment of a Forum of SAARC Election Management Bodies. The first EMBs conference in Dhaka had deliberated on a draft Charter for the proposed forum. Bhutan had presented the proposal to set up the Forum at the 37th session of the Standing Committee of SAARC held in Thimphu in April 2010. Once established the Forum will promote mutual contact and learning for enhancing capabilities of the election bodies of the Member States towards conducting free and fair elections. It will also highlight democratic experiences of the region on the international scene, apart from working as a regional focal point for interacting with its counterpart organizations around the world.

Conference Objectives

The conference had the following objectives in view:

- Exchange of views on electoral experiences in the SAARC region with a view to learn from each other for making electoral processes more transparent and efficient
- Cooperation among the Member States in developing the capabilities of the EMBs to ensure free, fair and credible elections
- Promotion of contacts and networking among the EMBs of the SAARC Member States
- To discuss the possibility of making a permanent Election Management Bodies Forum under SAARC Secretariat
- To keep the discussion rolling to finalize the Charter for EMB Forum, as it will help establish the entity as a formal body with clear lines of action

Highlights of the Conference Activities

The conference, which lasted for two days, had four sessions in which the participants presented insightful papers and made informative presentations on a wide range of themes including electoral justice, electoral legislation, dispute resolution, reforms, election financing, capacity-building, accountability, transparency, delimitation, voter registration, and role of observers. Delegates of the member countries included Chief Election Commissioners along with other senior officials of the respective EMBs, officials of the SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, officers of Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior of Pakistan, and representatives of UNDP Islamabad and International Foundation for Electoral Systems. A broad array of politicians from various political parties and Islamabad-based diplomats also attended the event.

The Member States, by adopting a resolution, agreed to establish a permanent Forum of SAARC Election Management Bodies to foster cooperation and share electoral experiences. Towards this objective, the conference endorsed the draft Charter which after receiving inputs from the Member States will be sent to SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu.

Annex-1: List of Delegates

Afghanistan

1. General Ayub Assil, Vice President, Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan

Bangladesh

2. Dr. A T M Shamsul Huda, Chief Election Commissioner, Bangladesh
3. Mr. Md. Sirazul Islam, Additional Secretary, Bangladesh Election Commission

Bhutan

4. Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, Chief Election Commissioner, Bhutan
5. Ms. Deki Pema, Election Commissioner, Bhutan
6. Mr. Dawa Tenzin, Director, Election Commission of Bhutan

India

7. Mr. S.Y Quraishi, Chief Election Commissioner, India
8. Mr. Akshay Rout, Director General, Election Commission of India
9. Dr. Alok Shukla, Deputy Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India
10. Mr. J.M. Lyngdoh, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India

Maldives

11. Mr. Ibrahim Waheed, Member, Election Commission of Maldives
12. Mr. Mohamed Asif, Deputy Director General, Elections Commission of Maldives

Nepal

13. Mr. Neel Kantha Uprety, Chief Election Commissioner, Nepal
14. Mr. Kishor Thapa, Secretary Election Commission of Nepal

Sri Lanka

15. Mr. S. Medawewa, Consultant, Department of Elections Sri Lanka

16. Mr. M. M. Mohammed, Senior Deputy Commissioner, Department of Elections Sri Lanka

SAARC Secretariat

17. Mr. Ghulam Dastagir, Director (ETS), SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu

Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre, UK

18. Dr. Anil Seal, Director, MCSC, UK

Pakistan

19. Mr. Justice (R) Hamid Ali Mirza, Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan
20. Mr. Justice (R) Muhammad Roshan Eassani, Member Election Commission (Sindh)
21. Mr. Justice (R) Riaz Kayani, Member Election Commission (Punjab)
22. Mr. Justice (R) Shahzad Akbar Khan, Member Election Commission (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)
23. Mr. Justice (R) Fazal-ur-Rehman, Member Election Commission (Balochistan)
24. Mr. Ishtiak Ahmad Khan, Secretary Election Commission of Pakistan

Annex-2: Conference agenda and programme

Day One, September 8, 2011

First Session/Inaugural: Towards electoral reforms and justice

- Opening remarks by Mrs. Farkhanda Aurangzeb, Facilitator Election Commission of Pakistan
- Keynote speech by Justice (R) Hamid Ali Mirza the Election Commissioner of Pakistan
- 'Electoral justice system' by Mr. Neel Kantha Uprety, Acting Chief Election Commissioner of Nepal
Chair: Election Commission of Sri Lanka
Discussant: Election Commission of India

Second Session: Election Observers and Voters' Registration

- 'Role of domestic and international observers in elections' presented by Mr. Siri Medawewa, Consultant to the Commissioner of Elections Sri Lanka
Chair: Election Commission of Nepal
Discussant: Election Commission of Bangladesh
- 'Registry of Civilians with Voting Rights' presented by Mr. Ibrahim Waheed, Commissioner, Election Commission of Maldives
Chair: Election Commission of Pakistan
Discussant: Election Commission of Bhutan

Day Two, September 9, 2011

Third Session: Strategic Planning, Electoral Rolls and Donors

- 'Strategic Planning for Election Management Bodies: A Case Study of Election Commission of Pakistan' presented by Justice (R) Hamid Ali Mirza, Chief Election Commissioner of Pakistan
Chair: Election Commission of Maldives
Discussant: Election Commission of Afghanistan
- 'Filling the Gaps in Electoral Roll - The National Voters' Day Experience' presented by Dr. S.Y. Quraishi, Chief Election Commissioner of India
Chair: Election Commission of Bangladesh
Discussant: Election Commission of Nepal

- 'Promoting a Wider Representation in National Legislatures and the Role of Election Management Bodies: A View from Bhutan' presented by Mr. Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan
Chair: Election Commission of Afghanistan
Discussant: Director MCSC UK
- 'Donors' relations with Electoral Management Bodies: Afghanistan prospective' presented by General Ayub Assil, Vice President, Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan
Chair: Election Commission of Bhutan
Discussant: J M Lyngdoh, Former Election Commissioner of India
- 'Some historical reflections on constitutions and electoral democracy in the British Raj and the successor independent nations of South Asia' presented by Dr. Anil Seal, Director Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Center, UK
Chair: Election Commission of India
Discussant: Election Commission of Afghanistan

Fourth/Concluding Session: Delimitation, EMBs & Stakeholders, SAARC Forum

- 'Challenges in Delimitation of Constituencies: The Bangladesh Experience' presented by ATM Shamsul Huda, Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh
Chair: Election Commission of India
Discussant: Election Commission of Sri Lanka
- 'Relation between Election Management Bodies and Stakeholders' presented by Mr. J M Lyngdoh, former Chief Election Commissioner of India
Chair: Election Commission of Pakistan
Discussant: Election Commission of Bhutan
- Discussion on establishment of SAARC Forum of EMBs, its draft Charter and adoption of Resolution by the Conference
- Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks by Mr. Justice (R) Riaz Kayani, Member of the Election Commission of Pakistan