

**FORUM OF ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES OF SOUTH ASIA
FEMBoSA**

Stewardship Report, 2018-2019

**Presented by Brig. General Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury
Election Commissioner of Bangladesh**

Hon'ble Chair and dear FEMBoSA friends.

The Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh assumed the Chair of FEMBoSA at the 9th Forum meeting held on 5-7 September 2018 in Dhaka.

The work plan for 2018-2019 agreed in 9th FEMBoSA meeting and the activities carried out by member EMBs of the period are incorporated in this report. Cooperation among member EMBs keeps moving stronger and cordial since inception of FEMBoSA in 2010. We believe this trend of understanding each other and sharing mutual knowledge and experiences would help reach our common goal of establishing strong democracy in the member countries of FEMBoSA through conducting free, fair and credible elections in the region.

The task and other activities carried out by the EMBs of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka are:

Task for Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan: Sharing experiences of 2018 Parliament elections.

The IEC of Afghanistan has shared its experiences of 2018 Parliament elections of the country that suffers from political unrests with deadly violence. The IEC needs reforms in the election system with much more tolerance and understanding of the political parties towards establishing rules of law. Below is the summary of the elections of 2018:

Total candidates contested had been with 2147 male (84%) and 418 females (16%). Total registered voters were 3,467,543 with 2,242,384 male (64.667%) and 1,158,380 female (33.406%).

Few favorable and positive positions the IEC shared are:

1. Completion of the legal framework of elections;
2. Balancing of polling centres;
3. Preparation of voters list for the first time;
4. Use of biometric technology within limited time;
5. Timely conducting of the elections;
6. Presence of around half a million monitors and observers in the electoral process;
7. Establishing good coordination between the IEC and the security forces; and
8. Extensive participation of citizens, voters etc.

Challenges that IEC faced:

1. Imposing of the biometric technology in the last minute. The last shipment of the equipment arrived at the IEC just 36 hours before the elections.
2. No proper awareness and training on biometric devices could be provided to polling personnel scarred throughout the country of difficult communication system;
3. Flaws remain in the voters list;
4. Flaws remain in the BVV devices and the manner of their use;
5. Limited time for recruiting and training of polling staff; and
6. Security threats and no- culturalization of election that led to inadequate participation of people and polling staff at polling centers.

The IEC also identified few areas of improvement of reforms and necessary preparations for next elections which include trained human resources, adequate financial supports, technical assistance and improved physical infrastructures, allocation of adequate time for electoral phases, setting up BVV technology and accreditation online database.

Task for Bangladesh Election Commission (BEC)

Establishing and maintaining a permanent official web-portal for FEMBoSA.

The Bangladesh Election Commission launched a web-portal 'www.fembosa.org' for FEMBoSA in the 9th FEMBoSA meeting on September 2018 in Dhaka with the aim of establishing a permanent web-portal for FEMBoSA. It is to be mentioned that websites previously launched by different countries have been deactivated. We like to trust Election Commission of India so that it becomes permanent.

Other important events:

1. **11th National Parliament Election Observation Program:** BEC successfully conducted 11th National Parliament Election on 30 December 2018. BEC invited the FEMBoSA member countries to observe the election. Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka participated the observation program and opined that voters were able to cast their votes in a festive mood and without any fear. The election was peaceful and well-organized. Law and order situation had been favourable. Most observers reported that the 11th parliament election in Bangladesh was free and fair.
2. **Voters Day:** BEC observed Voters' Day for the first time on 01 March 2019. This year BEC invites international delegates to participate in the Voters' Day program and an international seminar.

3. **Study tour of Election Commission of Bhutan in Bangladesh:** A 12-member delegation from Election Commission of Bhutan, led by Hon'ble Election Commissioner H.E. Ugyen Chewang, visited Bangladesh Election Commission for the purpose of study tour from 17-21 June 2019. The delegate visited on going local govt elections and observed election process. They also visited a voter registration centre and voting by use of EVM.

Task: Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB)

Election Commission of Bhutan was extremely busy with time-bound delimitation activities that coincide with the completion of ten-year delimitation cycle as well as tenure of the Second Local Government in 2018 and thus unable to conduct 10th FEMBoSA meeting.

Task: Election Commission of India (ECI)

Capacity building in emerging technologies and security concerns

As per the Work Plan for 2018-19 ECI conducted several Capacity Building training programmes for officials besides organizing two International Conferences and an Election Visitors Program during Lok Sabha elections 2019 for EMBs abroad. 20 officials from FEMBoSA countries attended these training programmers. High-level delegations from several FEMBoSA and countries and beyond participated in the International Conferences and EVP through the year.

Action Taken during October 2018 – November 2019

1. **Capacity Building Programmes:** The ECI conducted four International Training Courses wherein 113 officials from over 48 countries participated, including 20 officials from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
2. **Other International events:** High level delegations from EMBs from several FEMBoSA countries participated in the following International Conferences/programs organised by ECI :
 - (A) **International Conference on 'Making our Elections Inclusive & Accessible' and National Voters Day in New Delhi from 24-25 Jan 2019: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka** participated.
 - (B) **Election Visitors Programme in New Delhi from 10-13 May 2019 during General Elections to 17th Lok Sabha: Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka** participated.
 - (C) **A-WEB Executive Board Meeting on 02 Sep 2019, the 4th General Assembly on 03 Sep 2019 and International Conference on 'Initiatives and Challenges of Social Media and Information Technology in Elections' on 04 Sep 2019 in Bengaluru : Bangladesh, Bhutan and Maldives** participated.

Elections Commission, Nepal (ECN)

Task: Youth voter education program

Election Commission of Nepal has been working for enhancing the sanctity of elections in Nepal with managing free, fair, credible and cost-effective elections with special focus on promoting the participation of the youths in the electoral processes. For this, the Commission have arrangements on all the three dimensions of educational development: at the policy, institutional and program levels.

At the Policy Level

The Commission is in the process of finalizing its Third Strategic Plan while the Commission has already worked with its second Strategic Plan (2015 -2019) with equal emphasis in the electoral education for the youths. The Second Strategic Plan has the policy principles of conducting inclusive and participative electoral education along with the strategic pillar of expanding electoral education and organizational outreach consisting of partnership with electoral stakeholders and voter education through educational institutions, cultural programs, mobile voter education and targeted programs. The Commission has used the Strategic Plan as a fundamental guiding document in its operation.

At the institutional level

The Commission has already set up and operated Electoral Education and Information Center and it has already been decentralized establishing the centers in five core areas across the country. The center imparts theoretical and applied electoral education focusing on such concepts as human rights, civic rights and duties, election procedures and mock polling particularly to the school students and other stakeholders. The Center also provides knowledge management framework and electoral references for the youths interested in studying in the area of democracy and elections.

At the program and project level

The Commission has used different approaches to operationalize the youth electoral education in the field level and some of the initiatives include modern IT based approach, social interaction approach, cascaded training approach, school and university curriculum approach and out-reach approach.

1. IT approach

Use of Election Mobile App and social networking such as twitter and face book have been prioritized for the youth electoral education. This approach was experienced to be much effective in the election period.

2. School and university curriculum approach

This initiative is being used and expanded from school level to the university level. In the university level, the election and democracy content is being discussed to be kept in the course of political science. The Commission feels this approach becomes effective as all the youths studying in schools and universities have to compulsorily study the democracy and election related contents.

3. Cascaded training approach

This includes first giving trainings to the teachers of Social Studies subject who then impart their electoral knowledge and information to the students. This approach seems to be more effective for imparting electoral education to the youths as the teachers usually remain as a permanent good-will and interactive agent of the Commission working in schools and they educate different batches of the students with updated electoral information. It has multiplier effects in imparting electoral education.

4. Outreach education approach

This initiative has specially been used to reach the unreached for the electoral education. It has targeted mostly the youths studying in public schools which, due to resource and other constraints, cannot visit the Electoral Education and Information Center of the Commission for electoral education. This approach uses a team of educators with necessary contents and logistics such as brochures, television, touch pads and polling materials who then visit the schools and impart education on the basis of interactive learning along with conducting mock polling.

5. Social interaction approach

This is a holistic initiative of the Commission in which Voter Education Volunteers and community-based organizations at the local level are being mobilized to expand electoral education for all. They interact with the local people in the local communities.

Elections Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL)

Task: Mechanism for resolving disputes among stakeholders

Election Commission of Sri Lanka established the Electoral Disputes Resolution (EDR) Unit. The EDR was established before the recently concluded Presidential Elections. Regional centers were established in 25 Districts. Throughout the Election period, representatives of Accredited Election Observer Organizations, Representatives of Recognized Political Parties, and Sri Lanka Police contributed much to the smooth functioning of the EDR Unit.

For the first time, social media monitoring was carried out. State of the art IT and multimedia was utilized with dashboards displaying the live updates of the Complaints received and the gravity of the offenses. ECSL had successfully implemented Electoral Dispute Resolution. Complaints on Election related offenses, violations and violence were received through phone, fax, emails, facebook, messenger, twitter WhatsApp etc. All had been attended and recorded. For severe offenses further legal action will be taken. Complaints were mostly of distribution of goods and services for the promotion of candidates. In some cases, there were Complaints about unlawful transfers, appointments and distributions of goods. There was a dashboard indicating the frequency and nature of such offenses.