



**NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE
FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**REPORT OF THE
BANGLADESH ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION
March 11-19, 1990**



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of democracy in Bangladesh since independence in 1971 has been uneven. Elections over the past 19 years have often been turbulent and marked by allegations of fraud and intimidation. These complaints have typically, but not solely, been aimed at the government in power. Thus in turn has led to skepticism about the electoral results, and about the process itself. Opposition parties have at various times boycotted elections and resorted to strikes and demonstrations to articulate their views that they are not given a fair chance to compete.

Despite this background, in March 1990, Bangladesh held elections across the country for local council chairmanships. Although officially non-partisan in nature, many candidates were in fact affiliated with and supported by different parties, including the ruling Jatiyo Party and the two major opposition parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) sent an election assessment survey mission to Bangladesh at the time of the elections. The NDI team was not a full-scale election observation mission. Its purpose was to develop information on the electoral process, to suggest methods by which problems raised have been dealt with in other countries, and to identify possible avenues of further assistance in strengthening Bangladeshi democracy.

The team was present for the first five days of the 12 day election period. It found a number of positive and negative aspects to the election process. In the localities visited, the security forces appeared to be acting impartially. There was also considerable evidence of multi-party campaign activity, and electoral procedures appeared to be generally uniformly applied in different parts of the country. In contrast, however, the team visited several polling stations which either appeared to be under the control of Jatiyo Party officials or where intimidation or questionable electoral practices had occurred. In addition, the team was told of instances in which government officials had distributed free materials in election districts within 48 hours of the election, a period during which campaign activity is prohibited by law.

The team identified several specific areas of popular concern about the electoral process that have led to diminished credibility. These include violence and intimidation at the polls, problems with identification of voters, and allegations of ballot stuffing.

Development of a civic voters' organization might increase confidence in the electoral process. Such organizations have played important roles in contributing to the democratic process in a number of other countries. These broad-based and non-partisan

groups have worked with governments and electoral commissions to ensure that election rules are perceived as being fair and unbiased, to educate voters on the mechanics of balloting, to observe the conduct of the elections, and to conduct a parallel vote count. With presidential and parliamentary elections due to be held between 1991 and 1993, the present time could be propitious for the development of a civic voters' organization in Bangladesh.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. NDI Presence in Bangladesh

NDI has followed with interest the political situation in Bangladesh for a number of years. During the last three years NDI staff members have visited Bangladesh several times, and prominent Bangladeshi political figures have visited NDI in Washington.

In December 1989, a senior NDI staff member visited Dhaka to evaluate project prospects. NDI subsequently dispatched a five-member team to Bangladesh during elections for chairmen of upazila (local) councils in March 1990 to assess the electoral process and to recommend a specific NDI project that would help strengthen pluralistic and democratic political institutions.

The NDI team did not function as an election observation mission. As it was present only during the first part of the election period, the team did not develop detailed first-hand information on pre-election and campaign issues such as the freedom to campaign, access to media, and advantages of incumbency. The mission's purpose was to gather information on the actual administration of elections, identify possible obstacles to free and fair exercise of the franchise, and sample attitudes across the political spectrum regarding elections and their role in Bangladesh's political development. It also had the goal of identifying and developing contacts with groups involved in election observation and civic education.

The NDI team was led by Washington attorney William Oldaker. It also included Mariano Quesada, a founder and former General Secretary of the Philippines National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL); Dr. Chanaka Amaratunga, leader of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka; NDI Program Coordinator Ned McMahon; and NDI Consultant Eric Bjornlund. The team visited Bangladesh from March 9 through March 19. Members observed polling in six upazilas on four different days: Adamdighi Upazila in Bogra District on March 14 (12 polling stations); Sirajdikhan Upazila in Munshiganj District on March 14 (seven stations); Natore Upazila in Natore District on March 15 (three stations); Narsingdi Upazila in Narsingdi District on March 16 (14 stations); Basail Upazila in Tangail District on March 18 (five stations); and Ghatail Upazila

in Tangail District on March 18 (three stations). The team observed the counting process at the end of the day in four locations: Adamdighi in Adamdighi Upazila; Basail and Rasunia in Sirajdikhan; and Narsingdi.

B. Background

Government Since Independence. Sheik Mujibar Rahman was Bangladesh's leading nationalist leader before independence and its founding father in 1971. Mujib became Prime Minister in the country's first government after independence. In December 1974, facing economic deterioration and mounting civil disorder, Mujib declared a state of emergency, and one month later had the constitution amended to establish an executive presidency and to institute a one-party system.

In August 1975, Sheik Mujib was assassinated by a group of Bangladesh army majors. General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief of Army Staff, subsequently emerged as the dominant figure. Zia took over as Chief Martial Law Administrator in November 1976 and as President in April 1977. Zia himself was assassinated in an unsuccessful coup attempt in May 1981.

In March 1982, the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Hussain Mohammed Ershad, took power in a bloodless coup. He assumed the Presidency in December 1983.

There are many political parties and splinter groupings in Bangladesh. The two largest opposition parties are the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The Awami League was the party of Sheik Mujib, and is currently headed by his daughter, Sheikh Hasina Wajed. The BNP was founded by General Zia, and is led by Zia's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia.

There have been several national elections in Bangladesh since independence. Confidence in the electoral process, however, has been eroded by serious and repeated complaints about alleged partiality in the administration of elections, violence at a number of the polls, and the environment in which they have been held.

Bangladesh's Election Experience. Fraud and other serious irregularities have reportedly taken place in past Bangladeshi elections throughout the electoral process, from voter registration through vote tallying. Perhaps because of its obvious nature, many observers believe that the greatest single problem has been the physical intimidation of voters. Parties and candidates have reportedly employed bands of thugs known as "mastans" to intimidate voters in certain locations. Observers report that security forces have not always fulfilled their mandate, sometimes protecting voters and other times engaging in repressive acts themselves.

There appears to be a widespread desire for elections that offer a meaningful choice. While many Bangladeshi observers believe that other political institutions such as the Parliament require strengthening, they also believe that in the first instance the people must have confidence in the manner in which their leaders are chosen. The recent example of India, where Prime Minister Gandhi resigned after the Congress-I Party lost the parliamentary election, is frequently cited. The 1970 election in then-East Pakistan is also cited as an example of a free and fair election. In addition, in rural areas where the mass of the population lives, the traditional village-oriented structure has created a legacy of participatory politics, particularly regarding local issues.

III. UPAZILA ELECTIONS

A. Upazila System

March 1990 Elections. Between March 14 and March 24, Bangladesh held elections for the chairmanships of 426 of the country's 460 local subdistrict (upazila) councils. The other upazilas did not hold elections because only one candidate had registered, because of delays in completion of voter lists, or because of court disputes over demarcation of upazila boundaries. Each upazila held its election on a single day, and the elections were phased throughout the period in an attempt to assure sufficient distribution of security forces at polling places. Polling was halted on account of violence in some locations, requiring repolling in at least parts of 35 upazilas.

Because the upazila system does not incorporate urban areas, the elections were held in rural areas only. About 55 million voters were eligible, an average of 130,000 voters per upazila. There were over 21,000 separate polling stations, each with an average of 2,500 eligible voters.

Creation of Upazila System. President Ershad created the upazila system as a means of distributing development aid and other governmental assistance. The system devolves some power to the local level of governmental administration. Owing to their role in distributing and allocating development funds, the upazila councils are important sources of patronage and political power.

The first upazila elections were held in 1985. Major opposition parties refused to participate, and turnout was reported to be light.

Party Participation. As in 1985, the recent upazila elections were officially non-partisan. Winners became chairmen of the upazila councils, thus in effect becoming part of the national

government's administrative structure. Each winning candidate became the chief executive officer of a local unit of the executive branch of the national government.

In contrast to their official refusal to participate in the electoral process until President Ershad has resigned, the major opposition parties supported candidates in the upazila elections. Candidates of the Awami League contested elections throughout the country. Before the election the Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) stated that it would not sanction participation by its partisans, but BNP candidates contested in areas where they had substantial support. The non-party nature of these elections thus enabled opposition parties to test their electoral organization and support while officially maintaining their vow not to participate in elections as long as President Ershad remains in power.

The government stated unequivocally that the elections would be free and fair and issued a blanket invitation to observers. As such, the government may have viewed the upazila elections as a useful rehearsal for national elections. Presidential elections are due in 1991. Parliamentary elections, although not required until 1993, could be called sooner by President Ershad.

Electoral System and Candidate Eligibility. The upazila elections used a "first-past-the-post" system. The candidate with a simple plurality would be the victor.

To qualify, a prospective candidate had to file nomination papers on a designated day with one of the 63 returning officers throughout the country. To be eligible, an individual had to be a voter of that upazila and over 25 years of age. He also could not have any outstanding overdue loans from the government.

The returning officer then examined the credentials of the potential nominees and issued a list of "validly nominated candidates" within three days. Rejected candidates had three days to appeal to the deputy district commissioner. Just under 2,400 candidates qualified for the upazila elections in March.

Election Results. As of March 29, results were available for 400 upazila elections. Of these, candidates supported by the ruling Jatiyo Party won 177 elections, or about 44 percent of the contests reporting results. Candidates identified as Awami League supporters won 115 upazila chairmanships, or about 29 percent of the total reported. Candidates of the Islamic-based Jamaat-Islami Party won 25 chairmanships and candidates of the BNP captured control of 22 upazilas, about 6 percent and 5.5 percent, respectively. Independent candidates won 48 upazila contests, or almost 12 percent. These figures do not reflect any late election results or subsequent changes of party affiliation by winning upazila chairman.

Organizations Involved in Election Monitoring. During the March elections, two indigenous organizations, the Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh (CCHRB) and the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR), set up networks of election monitors. The CCHRB coordinated a network of some 1,000 volunteers from 10 member non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The CCHRB conducted a one-day training program in February for 14 leaders in the network. The BSEHR also planned to use volunteers from its own organization to monitor elections in a number of locations throughout the country. Both organizations requested permission to observe in polling stations. When the government responded, only days before the elections were to begin, it said that the electoral law did not provide for accreditation of observers and told them that they could only get authorization from the presiding officer at each polling station.

In addition to NDI, two other organizations, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration (EROPA), sent observers to Bangladesh during the upazila elections. The SAARC group included observers from Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. The EROPA group included public administration academics from the Philippines.

B. Electoral Process

This section reviews each phase of the balloting process used in the upazila elections.

Election Administration. A presiding officer supervised the operations of each polling station. Polling stations were typically public buildings such as schools. A typical polling station included three to five separate polling booths, each manned by one or two polling officials. Presiding officers and other polling officials were generally individuals employed by the government, often as teachers or civil servants.

Uniformed and armed policemen (typically 10-20 in number) provided security at each polling station. In addition, roving patrols of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), an elite national border security unit, travelled from station to station in motorized vehicles.

The election for each upazila was held on a single day. Polling hours were from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and the count at the polling station immediately followed the close of the polls.

Men and women waited in separate lines and voted in separate polling compartments. In the locations the team visited, more

women appeared to be voting in the morning and more men in the afternoon.

Voters' List. A nation-wide voting list, which Election Commission authorities stated had been updated within the last six months, was issued in February. The Commission reported that it appointed 300,000 to 400,000 officials to go door-to-door and then made the lists publicly available, primarily by providing copies to political parties, for comment. There were separate lists of voters for each polling booth at a given polling station. Each represented one or more villages. The list included several pieces of information for each voter, including the voter's name, his or her father's name, and his or her address.

Party polling agents sat inside the polling station in order to help identify voters and to object in the case of individuals who were not who they said they were. These party agents were intended to be people from the same locality as the voters so that they would personally know the voters. Thus, the party agents and the voters' lists together functioned as the means of identifying voters and preventing ineligible individuals from casting ballots, in effect playing the role played elsewhere by a national identity or voter registration card.

Issuance of Ballot. Ballots used throughout the country were identical: 10 symbols printed in two columns on newsprint-quality paper, approximately eight inches long and four inches wide. These same blank ballots were used in each location, regardless of the number of actual candidates. Each candidate was assigned a symbol (e.g. ship, pitcher, candle, rooster, pineapple) and campaigned under that symbol.

The Election Commission distributed the ballots in books of 100, and it distributed the number of ballots in each case as there were eligible voters at a given polling place. Each ballot was consecutively numbered on an attached stub or counterfoil.

To expedite the process of identifying voters, each voter, before entering the polling station, would report to one of several tables outside the station where representatives of the political parties or candidates had copies of the voters' lists. In most cases each candidate in the election had his own table, and most voters presumably reported to the table of the candidate they supported. The party representative would find the voter's name and corresponding number on the list and write down his or her number on a small piece of paper with the candidate symbol on it. The voter would then proceed into the polling station and present the paper to the election officials who would check the relevant name on the official version of the voters' list.

After voters were identified as eligible from the voters' list, they would sign or mark their thumbprints on the ballot stub. The voters would also dip their thumbs in ink to show that they had voted, and thus preventing them from voting again. Then, still in the presence of the candidate polling agents, a polling official would detach the ballot from the counterfoil, by tearing it out along a perforated line, and issue it to the voter with an ink stamp. The voter would then take the ballot and the ink stamp into the booth and mark the symbol of his or her choice. Typically the polling "booth" was fairly rudimentary, often little more than a piece of burlap hung in a way to give some privacy, but the polling booths that team members observed appeared to provide sufficient secrecy.

Polling officials would retain the books of "used" ballot stubs and return them to the presiding officer.

Ballot Boxes. After stamping the ballot, the voter would fold and drop it into the ballot box, again in front of the election officials and party polling agents. Ballot boxes came in two sizes, one about twice the size of the other.

At the beginning of the day, the presiding officer was to show candidate agents that each ballot box was empty and then seal it with string and wax. Local officials told team members that the wax was prepared solely for government use during elections and was not available elsewhere. When a box was filled, it was to be returned to the presiding officer's office and a new one would be issued. This procedure meant that extra ballot boxes and wax would always be in the custody of the presiding officer, but the NDI team observed sealing wax in some polling booth areas, outside the office of the presiding official.

Counting Process. At the close of the balloting, an election official would bring all of the ballot boxes to one room for counting. In the locations where team members observed the count, election officials spread out a mat on the floor and sat around the mat in a circle. The presiding officer then dumped the ballots out of the boxes into a pile in the center of the mat. At Adamdighi, officials unfolded and flattened all ballots and arranged them into neat piles before they were counted. The presiding officer himself then sorted the stacks of ballots, handing them to different assistants according to which symbol was marked. In the other three locations where the team witnessed the count, the unfolding and sorting process took place at the same time as each person involved in the count took ballots from the central pile, unfolded them, and then sorted them into piles by candidate. Periodically they consolidated the piles, and at the conclusion of the sorting process the presiding officer counted each candidate's pile of ballots. In each of the locations where team members were present, the count took place in the presence of candidate polling agents.

The counts that delegation members observed took place inside buildings without electricity while the sun set and darkness fell outside. Kerosene lamps provided an uneven quality of lighting inside the rooms.

Upon the completion of the count, the presiding officer and/or other polling officials informally announced the results to the assembled people. The NDI team did not follow the process beyond the announcement of the results at the polling station level.

Transmission of Results. Election officials reported that the results from each polling station would be communicated to the upazila center. Typically the presiding officer said that he himself would go to the upazila central office immediately after the completion of the count to report the results. He would take whatever transportation was available, e.g. boat, motorcycle, rickshaw, etc. Whether he planned to have a police escort or not seemed to vary. There also was no set rule for the physical transmission of the ballots to the center; some presiding officers planned on taking them with them, while others stated that the ballots would be sent separately.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

A. Limited Scope of NDI Mission

Given the limited scope of the NDI mission's terms of reference and the small size of the team, delegation members' impressions are based on a small sample that is not necessarily representative of the elections as a whole. In addition, the observations in the report reflect only the team's on-site observations. In this regard it is important to emphasize that the NDI team was on the ground only for the first five days of the electoral period. Its observations are not valid for the latter part of the elections, during which a larger percentage of upazila chairmanships were won by candidates of the Jatiyo Party.

Moreover, due to logistical and time constraints, NDI representatives did not follow the process beyond the count at the local level. Thus they did not develop any impression about the efficiency or accuracy of the communication of results from the polling station level to the upazila center, the compilation of vote totals, or the transmission of results to the Election Commission in Dhaka.

B. Positive Impressions

The delegation noted many encouraging signs in the upazila elections. Election officials and security personnel in many

locations appeared to be actively engaged in conducting, at their level, a free and fair election.

First, many of the stations appeared, as far as NDI observers could determine, to be run efficiently and fairly. In this regard, specific centers to be noted were the Basail and Rasulnia stations in the Sirajdikhan Upazila. The presiding officers in both of these centers seemed professional and dedicated. Voters were lined up in an orderly manner, and election officials were able to find their names and issue ballot papers quickly and efficiently.

Second, an atmosphere seemingly conducive to genuine multi-party democracy was present in many locations, and there seemed to be real enthusiasm among many voters and supporters of candidates from various parties. At the opening of the polls, for example, there were large numbers of people waiting in line to vote, and in many locations there seemed to be substantial interest in the proceedings. Also, there was evidence that voters were not easily intimidated; after a disruption in one polling site by the presence of mastans and the explosion of a number of small, firecracker-style "bombs," the previously high level of voting activity quickly returned to normal.

Third, the NDI team saw extensive evidence of multi-party activity. In each place NDI visited, there were candidates from more than one party, and there was evidence of support for more than one candidate. The team did not observe any apparent reluctance to publicly support or to openly identify with opposition party candidates.

Fourth, the NDI team noted that in most places visited the security forces seemed to be making a positive contribution; there was little evidence of security personnel participating in electoral fraud or intimidating voters. Patrols of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) seemed high profile and frequent. One incident observed was particularly striking. Late in the day at one location in Narsingdi, the police officer in charge reported that a group of men had attempted to raid and disrupt the polling station. According to witnesses, the officer fended off the attack and the gang dispersed, but security officials remained prepared for a new attack while the balloting and then the counting were completed.

C. Problematic Observations

The team also visited polling locations where important questions about the fairness of the process were raised. At the Chambakdi polling station in Sirajdikhan, for example, the presiding officer reported that seven or eight men had grabbed a pad of ballots and had attempted to stuff several ballots into the ballot box. However, the presiding officer said that the men had

been chased away and that he relieved the polling official involved of his duties.

Three individuals outside the Chambakdi station told team members that polling officials did not allow them to vote because the voting list indicated that they had voted already. One of these persons claimed that the same thing had happened to other members of his family, and another showed a list of about 25 eligible voters who he said were also turned away because polling officials said they had already voted.

Near the Kathaldi Primary School polling station in Sirajdikhan, the team saw a number of people running away from the polling station. Several stopped long enough to report that they had heard explosions. At the nearby Shialdi Primary School, witnesses confirmed reports of between two to four explosions, apparently referring to the same ones that had frightened the people that team members saw at Kathaldi. While at the Shialdi center, team members observed one man being arrested. A policeman reported that the man was being arrested for being a false voter; another policeman reported that he was being arrested for carrying a knife; and a local polling official reported that he had been involved in an altercation.

At 2:00 P.M. at one location in Narsingdi, the presiding officer reported that 75 percent of the eligible voters had already cast ballots. Very few voters were in evidence, but the Jatiyo Party agent, who followed team members from one polling booth to the next and answered many questions addressed to the presiding officer, gave various explanations for the apparent absence of voters (e.g. they were all at lunch, at the market, etc.). Meanwhile, several team members, apparently followed by a couple of men who had been outside the polling station, walked into the nearby village to ask people if they had voted and whether they had seen long lines of voters earlier in the day. Many people seemed reluctant to respond, but no one reported seeing a large crowd waiting to vote earlier in the day and one older man, who said he was the town's doctor, reported that when he had voted at 9:30 a.m. there were only about a dozen men and about 20 women in line.

Team members also heard many reports of government officials distributing free rice and corrugated iron in electoral districts up to election day. The Minister of Relief, for example, was reported to have handed out such supplies in Adamdighi shortly before the election. The Bangladesh election law prohibits campaign activities during the last 48 hours before the election.

V. CONCERNS ABOUT ELECTORAL PROCESS

A variety of concerns about the electoral process has led to serious mistrust among Bangladeshis in election results. To strengthen confidence in the process, experience from other countries shows that safeguards can be built into the system to detect and expose significant fraud.

Concerns raised with the NDI team about the electoral process fell into three categories: (a) allegations of intimidation, (b) problems with identification of voters, and (c) concerns about ballot stuffing and the integrity of the count. Such issues are often raised in elections around the world. There are many examples of popular oversight of the process resulting in constructive steps being taken to deal with the problems, be they actual or perceived.

A. Intimidation

Allegations of organized intimidation of voters are heard across the political spectrum in Bangladesh. Such problems are common in other countries as well. Regardless of the validity of these allegations, the perception of widespread political intimidation undermines confidence in the electoral process and the political system.

Nature of Problem. Intimidation of voters can take many forms. Complaints about "intimidation" refer to problems as disparate as physical assault or threat of violence, subtle psychological attempts to instill fear, and threats to cut or withhold government resources. The purpose of intimidation can be to prevent legitimate voters from casting ballots or to coerce them into voting for a particular candidate. In Bangladesh specific charges of intimidation range from gangs scaring voters away from polling stations to subtle but illegitimate threats by government officials to withhold essential government services.

In addition to intimidation of voters, instances of intimidation of political parties, candidates, and party activists have also been reported in Bangladesh, as in many other countries. In Bangladesh, the problem has reportedly been the physical harassment of politically active individuals. In other countries, intimidation of political leaders has included impediments to party registration, restrictions on campaigning, and even detention of candidates and party activists.

Addressing and Preventing Intimidation. There are a number of ways that governments, election commissions and concerned civic

organizations can address perceived problems of intimidation. In other countries, attempts to address problems of election day intimidation have included:

- *accrediting domestic and foreign observer groups and permitting access of such groups to polling stations;

- *prohibiting entry of police and security personnel inside polling stations unless requested to do so by the presiding officer;

- *ensuring the presence of sufficient security personnel in the vicinity of the polling stations; and

- *ensuring good communications between election officials and security personnel on-site and their superiors.

More general attempts to prevent or mitigate the effects of intimidation in other countries have included:

- *taking steps to increase confidence in the impartiality and fairness of the election commission;

- *creating an institution, such as an independent commission or an election commission subcommittee, to investigate and make findings about allegations of intimidation;

- *emphasizing civic education to ensure that voters know that their vote is secret, that their participation is important, and that they should resist attempts to pressure them into voting for particular candidates; and

- *ensuring protections for freedom of assembly and freedom of speech and guaranteeing open media access.

The idea of independent observers deserves particular comment in the Bangladesh context. In many countries, election commissions have heightened confidence in the electoral process by accrediting foreign and domestic election observers. The presence of observers at polling stations can provide voters with a sense of security and deter more blatant forms of intimidation. These poll-watchers must be well trained and impartial. They must also be careful not to slow down or interfere with the process at the polling site or to become themselves a source of controversy or intimidation.

The presence of independent observers, both domestic and foreign, has been successful in cases where accreditation has been liberally issued to groups that demonstrate non-partisan bona fides. In this regard, many election laws expressly permit duly accredited organizations to have access to polling stations, subject to the power of presiding officers to impose reasonable

restrictions in the interest of preserving order. Such laws typically require the election commission to accredit bona fide religious, civic, professional, trade, business and other non-partisan organizations, including foreign observers, to monitor the voting and counting process. Election commissions issue identification cards to individuals associated with duly accredited groups.

B. Identification of Voters

Multiple Voting and Voter Disenfranchisement. The NDI team in Bangladesh heard allegations of various problems with the voters' lists and the identification of voters. These included charges of multiple voting and disenfranchisement of voters on the ground that ballots had already been ready been cast in their names. Although the actual extent of such problems is difficult to determine, sole reliance on visual identification certainly increases the possibilities for fraud.

Responses to Identification Problems. In addition to adopting administrative and procedural safeguards such as those listed below, other countries have responded to concerns about voter identification in the following ways:

- *adopting a system of issuing a national voter identification card (or using another document to fulfill the same purpose), including a mechanism to mark the card or document to indicate that its holder has already voted;

- *requiring voters without the proper identification to be identified by an affidavit of another voter with proper identification or by a recognized, local traditional leader;

- *making regular, periodic updates of voter lists and making those lists public in advance of election day;

- *providing an efficient and credible procedure to investigate challenges to the accuracy of the voters' list and to correct mistakes;

- *marking voters' fingers with indelible ink, including in some countries an ink visible only under ultraviolet light;

- *improving the quality of paper and ink pads used for fingerprints in order to prevent smudging or bleeding; and

*training election officials in proper fingerprinting technique.

While other countries in the region, including Pakistan and Sri Lanka, have used a voter identification card system, the idea of a national voter identification card deserves particular mention in the context of Bangladesh. There may be objections to such a system in Bangladesh, however, because of the expense involved and the difficulty in ensuring that every eligible voter receives a card (which was a particular problem in Pakistan). The Bangladesh government may wish to discuss the cost question with international organizations that provide election-related technical assistance. In any event, some kind of voter identification card system would not preclude the necessity for party agents at polling stations.

C. Validity of Ballots and Integrity of the Count

Nature of the Problem. Allegations of fraud in the casting and counting of ballots also undermine confidence in the process. In past elections in Bangladesh, concern has centered on allegations that ballot boxes have been stuffed with sham ballots. In other countries, allegations of manipulation of the count have also been common.

Safeguards. Concerns about the accurate identification of voters and the prevention of fraudulent or multiple voting are common to elections throughout the world. A variety of procedural safeguards and election administration improvements have been developed in many countries, including:

*controlling the handling of ballots and ballot boxes, including strictly limiting the number of ballots and ballot boxes issued to each polling station to the number necessary given the number of eligible voters at that station;

*numbering ballot boxes and requiring that all ballot boxes not in use remain in a secure place in the custody of the presiding officer;

*securing ballot boxes with metal padlocks etched with individual serial numbers or at least making sure that access to sealing wax or sealing materials is strictly limited;

*requiring that, before the polls open on election day, the presiding officer show that all ballot boxes are empty and then lock or seal them in the presence of the party polling agents;

*ensuring that the ballot booths provide sufficient privacy so as to protect the secrecy of the ballot;

*permitting party agents and accredited observers to observe election officials carrying the ballot boxes from the polling booths to the counting room;

*requiring the presiding officer to announce the count at each polling station and to give a form with the official results to accredited observers and candidate agents ;

*organizing (by parties and/or non-partisan observer groups) parallel, independent tabulations of announced results and/or "quick counts" of selected locations;

*developing a uniform and secure method of sending the actual ballot papers to district centers.

The provision to poll-watchers of official results at the local level will enable political parties and observer groups to verify the results released by the Election Commission, to identify specific areas where there are discrepancies, and to conduct a parallel vote tabulation. This should increase the confidence of the parties and the public in the process.

VI. CREATION OF A CIVIC ELECTIONS ORGANIZATION

Democracy in Bangladesh has a real chance to become institutionalized and accepted by all. Political leaders, government officials, civil servants, lawyers, journalists and businessmen all expressed to NDI their commitment to democracy and their desire for fully free and fair elections in which the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box is unquestioned. Despite past problems with elections, the basic foundations for democratic institutions are present. These include, inter alia: political parties with popular support; a tradition of periodic elections; a reasonably independent bar and judiciary; an election law and election commission that could ensure free and fair elections; and the growth of democracy throughout the world, especially in neighboring countries such as India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, all of which share cultural and institutional traditions with Bangladesh.

Vital to this process is confidence in the electoral system. The NDI mission heard from a wide range of viewpoints in Bangladesh a desire for the establishment of safeguards that can demonstrate the legitimacy of the process to one and all. There appears to be an understanding that it is not simply the government's responsibility to assure this; ordinary people must invest of themselves in the process as well.

In this regard, it was suggested that democracy in Bangladesh might be furthered by the establishment of a non-partisan civic organization designed to harness popular support for democracy. Such an organization could focus on educating people about the voting process and involve them in assuring the legitimacy of elections. Similar groups have made substantial contributions to transitions to democracy in other countries. In the Philippines, for example, the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) mobilized support for democratic and electoral reforms from various sectors of Philippine society and organized massive, non-partisan election monitoring operations for the 1984 and 1987 legislative and the 1986 presidential elections. In Chile, the Crusade for Civic Participation (CIVITAS) promoted voter registration, carried out a program of civic education, and participated in a non-partisan "quick count" of the results of the 1988 presidential plebiscite. In Paraguay, for the May 1989 presidential elections, the Center for Democratic Studies (CED) organized a massive voter education campaign, trained 8,000 poll-watchers from all the major parties, helped coordinate a public opinion poll, and assisted in an independent vote count on election day.

In Bangladesh, an organization of this nature could work with the government and the Election Commission to develop and publicize the rules under which the next presidential and parliamentary elections would be held. The organization could also sensitize the population to civic voter education issues, help train independent poll-watchers, and conduct a parallel vote count at election time.

There are impediments to the functioning of a nation-wide organization in Bangladesh, due to the low level of literacy and poor transportation and communications. The organization would have to be broad-based and rigorously non-partisan in order to avoid misunderstandings about its purpose. Given a sense of commitment, discipline and a desire for a fully democratic process on behalf of the Bangladeshi people, these problems need not be insurmountable. The development of a civic voters' organization requires a considerable commitment on the behalf of many individuals from different parts of Bangladeshi society. If successful, it could raise the confidence of the people in the electoral process, deter intimidation at the polls, and create the conditions under which the will of the people, whatever it might be, could be respected by the population as a whole.

Democracy is sweeping across the globe. The international community is now expecting a higher degree of commitment to democracy from countries around the world. Nonetheless, organizations such as NDI can at best play a limited role. The willingness to work hard together to ensure democracy in their country must come from the people of Bangladesh themselves.