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**FINAL REPORT**  
**BANGLADESH**  
**USAID Cooperative Agreement No 388-0002-A-00-3004-00**  
**January 10, 1993 to April 30, 1997**

**I. SUMMARY**

From January 1993 through December 1994 with funding from the U S Agency for International Development (USAID) under Grant No 499-0002-A-3004-00, NDI conducted a program to strengthen the parliament of Bangladesh as a democratic decision making institution. The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) worked with members of the parliament to enhance the institution's organizational capacity and policy expertise for effective democratic governance. The program built upon NDI's extensive experience in Bangladesh and focused on relations among parliamentarians and those individuals and institutions with whom they interact, including other lawmakers, other governmental institutions, constituents and the political party structure outside the parliament. In October 1994, NDI determined that its planned program was no longer appropriate or reasonable due a deteriorating political environment. Existing USAID funds were reprogrammed under Grant No 388-0002-A-00-3004-00, and NDI began an electoral assistance program that included a parallel vote tabulation component from January 1995 through April 1997. The program was designed to assist a group of Bangladeshi NGOs interested in forming a coalition to organize an effective system of election monitoring for the general election.

**II. BACKGROUND**

Bangladesh achieved independence from Pakistan in 1971 amid high popular expectations of constitutional and democratic governance. Bangladesh's 1972 constitution provided for a parliamentary form of government, an independent judiciary and the protection of fundamental human rights. The country's political system, however, has been plagued since its inception by military intervention, the assassination of key political leaders and an authoritarian style of political leadership that together have prevented the consolidation of democracy.

Between 1973 and 1991, Bangladesh conducted five parliamentary and three presidential elections. Only one of these elections, the parliamentary election of 1991, was generally considered free and fair. During that time, an elected government had never directly transferred power to another party through a normal democratic process<sup>1</sup> and the country has been ruled by authoritarian

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<sup>1</sup>Elected in 1998 the Awami League president, resigned in December 1990. An interim 'caretaker government' was appointed, which conducted the 1991 parliamentary elections. Thus, the transfer of power from one elected government to another was interrupted by a process of dubious constitutionality.



regimes or the military through most of its existence. This lack of democratic institutions impaired the government's ability to effectively govern Bangladesh and respond to the needs of its citizens.

In 1992, in support of the consolidation of democracy in Bangladesh, NDI conducted a project to strengthen the parliament of Bangladesh as a democratic decision making institution.

The stated objectives of the original program were to

- work with legislators from all parties to enhance the parliament's organizational capacity and policy expertise to develop mechanisms for effective democratic governance
- build upon NDI's previous experience in Bangladesh and focus on relations between parliamentarians and those bodies and people with whom they interact, including other members of parliament, other governmental institutions, their constituents and the political party structure outside the parliament
- organize a seminar and consultations on parliamentary processes, and conduct ongoing consultations with Bangladeshi democratic activists, parliamentarians and party leaders

Election-related issues grew increasingly contentious during the next two years, however, contributing to the deterioration of the political situation in Bangladesh. The changed political environment as well as, the opposition parties' boycott of parliament and related activities beginning in March 1994 led NDI to shift the focus of its program.

After several visits to Bangladesh during which NDI staff members met with government officials, election commissioners, political party leaders and civic organizers, the Institute submitted a proposal to reprogram existing funds to an electoral assistance program that would incorporate a parallel vote tabulation component. Given the political environment, the credibility of upcoming general elections appeared crucial for the survival of multiparty democracy in Bangladesh.

The stated objectives of the new program were to

- assist a group of Bangladeshi NGOs interested in developing a coalition to establish an effective system of election monitoring for the general elections
- help restore public confidence in the electoral process and, ultimately, in the political process as a whole
- assemble an organized system of well-trained domestic election monitors, necessary to ensure the fairness of the national elections and to lay the foundation for long-term cooperation among civic groups

### III PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

1993

#### *Political Survey Mission*

From January through June 1993, NDI and the Study and Research Group for Socio-Economic Development (SRG), a Bangladeshi NGO with which NDI had previously worked, laid the groundwork for a July 1993 survey mission to assess possible program work with the parliament. NDI staff met in Washington with USAID, Department of State, and Bangladeshi embassy officials to brief them on the current political situation in Bangladesh. NDI staff also arranged for a member of the Australian parliament from New South Wales to join the July survey mission.

Two NDI staff members accompanied this Australian on a survey mission to Dhaka from July 5 to 8, 1993. They met with a broad range of elected officials, political party leaders, academics, journalists and leaders of non-governmental organizations to discuss the general political situation and the functioning of parliament. The team attended several sessions of parliament and one member of the team visited a rural constituency with a Bangladesh Member of Parliament (MP). The survey mission culminated in a meeting with the speaker of the parliament, who formally invited NDI to return to Bangladesh to conduct a seminar for MPs.

#### *Parliamentary Seminar*

After completing the survey mission, the NDI team worked with its regional counterpart and representatives from the three other major parties to establish the date and agenda for the parliamentary seminar. NDI put together a four-person team of elected officials: Australian MP Peter Nagle, Bulgarian MP Ekaterina Mihaelova, Irish MP Charles Flanagan and U.S. State Senator Janice Niner.

The seminar took place September 25 to 26, 1993. The opening ceremony featured the speaker of parliament, the minister of state for planning, who was the speaker's liaison with NDI, and Peter Nagle. The international participants discussed the functioning of their own parliaments and their responsibilities as members. Approximately 50 Bangladeshis from the four major parties and several minor parties attended the seminar.

NDI originally intended to conduct the next phase of the program toward the end of 1993. A number of other international and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) scheduled parliamentary workshops and seminars for December 1993, however, making additional activity difficult and possibly redundant. NDI sought and obtained a one-year extension of the project, which moved the end date from December 31, 1993, to December 31, 1994.

1994

### *Political Consultations*

NDI Director of Asia Programs Eric Bjornlund, Senior Associate for Governance Thomas Melia and Program Officer Maryam Montague traveled to Bangladesh from April 7 to 13, 1994, to consult with the speaker and other members of parliament, government officials, party leaders, representatives of nongovernmental organizations and U S embassy and USAID officials to determine the next phase of the Institute's parliamentary assistance program

The team arrived to find that the political opposition had called a nationwide strike protesting alleged rigging of a recent by-election in Magura and demanding the appointment of a neutral government to oversee future elections Political leaders from across the Bangladeshi political spectrum and representatives from a variety of Bangladeshi institutions encouraged NDI to continue its parliamentary program despite the political turbulence

Based on NDI's consultations during the April trip to Bangladesh and continuing contacts with Bangladeshi political leaders from all parliamentary parties, the Institute had planned to conduct consultations with representatives from a parliamentary committee in July 1994 In mid-June, however, the Awami League informed NDI that in light of its boycott of Parliament it would not be able to participate in NDI's planned committee consultations NDI subsequently postponed the committee program

Bjornlund and Montague returned to Dhaka from July 31 to August 3 to assess Bangladesh's tenuous political situation and to discuss and evaluate ideas for upcoming NDI program activities During this visit, Bjornlund and Montague met with Bangladesh's chief election commissioner, several government officials, political party leaders of the four major parties, NGO activists, journalists, USAID officials and U S Ambassador David Merrill

On July 31, Bjornlund and Montague attended a seminar entitled, "Reflections on Ensuring Free and Fair Elections in Bangladesh," organized by the SRG The seminar marked the first time that MPs from all the parties met to discuss the caretaker government issue While many representatives agreed with the suggestion that a parliamentary committee be formed to address the impasse over the caretaker government question, no final determination on the matter was reached

Given the deteriorating political situation in Bangladesh, NDI determined that its planned program to assist the development of parliamentary committees was no longer appropriate or reasonable In an August 29, 1994 letter to USAID Program Director Karl Schwartz, NDI proposed to redirect funds toward an election support program

NDI staff visited Dhaka from November 21 to 27, 1994 to meet with government officials, leaders of the major political parties, the chief election commissioner, NGO activists, USAID officials and the U S Ambassador David Merrill The NDI team found that the political situation continued to be tense

1995

### *Independent Vote Tabulation*

In early January 1995, NDI Program Officer Montague traveled to Dhaka to establish a field presence and began implementing NDI's election support program. The first formal activity of the program was a three-day series of consultations on parallel vote tabulations (PVT). The Institute brought NDI Senior Advisor Glenn Cowan to Dhaka to determine whether a parallel vote tabulation would be possible in the Bangladeshi context. On January 9, Cowan conducted a workshop for 23 representatives from 10 organizations and coalitions. This was the first large meeting of NGOs interested in forming a coalition to monitor the upcoming general elections. The Bangladeshis decided to use the term "independent vote tabulation" (IVT) instead of "parallel vote tabulation" because they felt that the word "independent" would be perceived as less threatening than the word "parallel." On January 10, Cowan conducted a technical training session for a number of NGO representatives.

Following Cowan's departure, the SRG tested some of the IVT techniques during the January municipal and by-elections, which were contested by all parties. The SRG monitored the four municipalities – Barisal, Sylhet, Chandpur and Shibgonj – where municipal elections took place on January 22, 1995. The SRG also monitored four by-elections on January 25, 1995. The SRG placed stationary monitors in Bakergonj-6 and mobile teams in Sherpur-3, Natore-3, Bakergonj-6 and Brahmanbaria-6. Only the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and independent candidates contested these elections. NDI assisted the SRG in analyzing the monitors' findings and developing the election statement.

### *Fair Election Monitoring Alliance*

With NDI's assistance, SRG then organized grassroots NGOs and other groups based in Dhaka to form a coalition of domestic election monitors. The first formal coalition meeting was held on January 28, 1995. The groups negotiated the composition and structure of the coalition and eventually made some decisions on the sharing of power, the division of responsibilities and the criteria for membership in the coalition. The group decided to adopt the name "Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA)", and began organizing a national training seminar on domestic election monitoring. FEMA national committee leaders were able to attract the largest and most important Bangladeshi NGOs to the coalition, adding to the credibility of the election monitoring effort.

As part of NDI's ongoing efforts to support the Bangladeshi democratization process, four Bangladeshis – SRG Convenor Feroz Hassan, SRG Executive Director Tarikul Ghani, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee Director of Programs Salehuddin Ahmed, and Gono Unayan Prochesta Director Ataur Rahman – attended a joint NDI/National Citizen's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) conference in Manila from February 22 to 25, 1995. (The Bangladeshi NGO leaders' participation in the Philippines conference was not funded by the Bangladesh grant from USAID.)

The conference was designed to provide representatives from Asian monitoring organizations in 12 countries with an opportunity to compare activities and develop a formalized network. It ultimately inspired the Bangladeshi NGO leaders and solidified the formation of FEMA. Also, as a result of the conference, the organizations within FEMA became more committed to cooperating on a monitoring parallel vote tabulation. Finally, at the conference, the Bangladeshi NGO leaders began a dialogue with leaders of other monitoring organizations throughout Asia.

### *Domestic Election Monitoring Seminar*

NDI and FEMA cosponsored a domestic election monitoring seminar from March 7 to 9, 1995. Bangladeshi participants included 30 representatives from civic organizations in regions throughout the country. FEMA leaders – Fakruddin Ahmed, Feroz Hassan, Tarikul Ghanı and Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah – and international participants – Telibert Laoc of the National Citizen’s Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) in the Philippines and Santiago Canton, NDI director of Latin America programs – shared their experiences in election monitoring with the Bangladeshi participants.

The seminar was divided into plenary sessions and workshops. Seminar topics included recruiting, training and organizing volunteers, pre-election monitoring, election day monitoring, conducting a parallel vote tabulation, and post-election monitoring. The seminar also featured a presentation titled, “Election Monitoring within the Context of the Bangladesh Electoral Law” by Election Commission Additional Secretary S M Zakaria and an election day simulation exercise led by NDI Program Officer Montague.

In workshop sessions, participants delved into topics discussed during the plenary sessions. The workshops provided participants with the opportunity to consider the practical challenges of creating the large network of volunteers necessary to conduct a successful election monitoring effort and to develop possible solutions to obstacles. The workshops also provided a forum for discussion of techniques and strategies for creating regional chapters of FEMA and for conducting training sessions.

After the national training seminar, FEMA leaders and seminar participants began to implement the plans that they had developed there. They organized meetings of NGO leaders throughout Bangladesh to establish regional chapters of FEMA.

### *NDI Field Presence*

USAID approved NDI’s proposal in spring 1995 to conduct a nonpartisan election monitoring, research into a possible independent vote tabulation and political party monitoring. Subsequently, NDI prepared to establish a long-term field presence in Bangladesh, sending three field representatives to the country for the three months leading up to and including the July elections. To conduct the program, NDI hired Peter Manikas, an experienced political organizer and former NDI representative in West Africa, Peter Redmond, also a political organizer, and Melissa Estok, a former NDI representative to Yemen, Mexico and Peru with IVT experience.

In April 1995, NDI staff members in Washington, D C , briefed Dr Neil Nevitte, a statistician and political science professor from Canada, on the current situation in Bangladesh Dr Nevitte had conducted extensive research on elections and parliamentary systems and had been involved in election monitoring and parallel vote tabulations in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa NDI's staff described the political situation in the country, provided general information on the infrastructure and demographics of the country, reviewed the status of FEMA's effort to organize down to the local level, and outlined the major concerns and monetary problems the organization faces Nevitte, in turn, shared with NDI staff members his views on the feasibility of conducting an IVT in Bangladesh and the role of an IVT as part of a broader election monitoring operation

### *Thailand Election Observation*

NDI sponsored two FEMA representatives to observe the activities of PollWatch, Thailand's national election monitoring network, during the Thai parliamentary elections on July 2, 1995 FEMA Member Secretary Tarikul Ghami and Shamsun Nahar, one of the key trainers for the Alliance participated Taking place from June 27 through July 3, the program allowed the delegation to explore how another Asian election monitoring organization addresses issues of structure, public relations, volunteer recruitment and training, center-province coordination and communication, and grievance processing and administration

The delegation remained in Bangkok from June 27 to 29, 1995 to observe the structure and functioning of PollWatch headquarters during the days leading up to the election During this time, the FEMA delegates consulted with the executive director of PollWatch as well as officials in each of PollWatch's four functional divisions secretariat, grievance processing, regional office coordination and public relations During the FEMA representatives' time at PollWatch headquarters before elections, Ghami also received detailed information on financial management Additionally, he was interviewed about FEMA on a Thai radio station

On June 30, 1995, the representatives split to observe active regional offices, one in Ayutthaya outside Bangkok, the other in Ubon Ratchathani in northeast Thailand One NDI staff member joined each FEMA team to provide support and guidance throughout the week The FEMA representatives analyzed PollWatch's mandate, accountability, post-election status, handling of monitors' reports and press relations as well as the technical administration of elections in Thailand

On the evening of July 1, 1995, Ghami and NDI staff returned to Bangkok to observe the operation of PollWatch headquarters on election day Nahar and NDI staff remained in Ubon Ratchathani to learn about the organization and activities of a regional office on election day The Bangladeshi representatives received credentials to enter the polling stations and thus were able to observe the full range of activities of the PollWatch volunteers The presence of delegates in both the headquarters and in the provinces maximized their exposure to how a national election monitoring network coordinates its respective functions and responsibilities on election day

### *FEMA Institution-building*

In mid-August 1995, Dr. Nevitte traveled to Dhaka to discuss with FEMA the various types of election monitoring activities that might be undertaken. Nevitte conducted consultations with the FEMA national committee, the media, the Election Commission, the political parties, the donor community, and representatives from the U.S. embassy and USAID. Nevitte outlined theoretical and practical concerns that should be considered when contemplating and fielding questions about a fast action election program. Finally, Nevitte advised FEMA on refining its work plan for the general monitoring effort and on developing a media strategy.

NDI assisted FEMA in developing an organizational structure that would allow the Alliance to conduct a wide range of activities. Nevitte and NDI staff helped with FEMA design five working committees: Public and Legal Affairs, Organization, Recruitment and Training, Communications, Logistics and Finance, Technical, and Media. A list of activities and time lines were drafted for each of these committees.

In addition to assisting FEMA in putting together training teams, the NDI field team participated in and helped plan FEMA training seminars. Several NDI recommendations for future training sessions were later implemented by FEMA, including 1) shortening seminars from three to two days to ensure greater participation, 2) distributing instructive materials prior to the seminar, and 3) utilizing a more participatory training approach. Unfortunately, several seminars were postponed or eliminated due to national *hartals* and transportation strikes.

### *FEMA National Conference*

NDI supported FEMA's national conference on October 26, 1995. The Alliance's National Committee approved three documents, which had been developed by NDI: a Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates, Guidelines for Nonpartisan Election Monitors, and Proposed Revisions to the Election Code. FEMA invited the chief election commissioner and eight foreign ambassadors to the morning reception. Topics discussed in the afternoon included staffing FEMA's five committees, reports from the existing committees, how to proceed without international funding (if necessary), guidelines for domestic observers, and revising the election law to include provisions regarding domestic monitors. The conference also helped to generate publicity for FEMA's election monitoring efforts.

### *NDI President's Visit*

In early November 1995, NDI President Kenneth Wollack traveled to Bangladesh to meet field staff, members of the Bangladesh Parliament, political party leaders and NGO representatives. During an event organized for his visit, Wollack applauded FEMA's efforts, provided them with examples of domestic election monitoring successes that lacked international financial support and spoke about alternative fundraising plans. Wollack also met with Election Commission Chairman Justice Sadeque and Additional Secretary S. M. Zakaria to discuss domestic election monitoring and explain NDI's program to support FEMA's efforts.

Wollack later met with both the leader of the opposition and the prime minister. He and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina spoke about the need to move forward on issues such as training candidate agents and permitting domestic monitors so that efforts to ensure free and fair elections would not be paralyzed by the political impasse on the caretaker government issue. In the meeting with Prime Minister Zia, Wollack discussed NDI's work with political party and nonpartisan monitors, including FEMA.

NDI field staff continued to act as a liaison between FEMA and several other organizations that planned to monitor the election or provide election day support for monitoring activities. In this capacity, NDI field representatives met with officials of the Coordinating Committee on Human Rights (CCHRB) and the Bangladesh Legal Aid Society. They also attended a meeting of the international donors who had made financial commitments to support FEMA and other monitoring organizations. The meetings aimed to ensure that interested parties were coordinating their election-related activities in order to minimize duplication.

## **1996**

### *FEMA Activities*

In January 1996, FEMA conducted regional and district committee meetings in Barisal, Faridpur, Rangpur, Dhaka and Chittagong attended by representatives from each of the 10 regional committees. NDI attended the meetings in Barisal, Faridpur and Dhaka. An NDI field representative traveled outside Dhaka to assist FEMA in organizing its network, conducting training workshops at the regional and district levels, motivating volunteers amid a climate of political and financial uncertainty, and addressing concerns about communications, legal accreditation of monitors and funding.

Based on discussions with regional FEMA representatives, NDI wrote a memorandum to FEMA's national leadership offering suggestions for improving communication between its National Committee and the regions, ensuring legal accreditation of monitors and obtaining more local funding for the election monitoring program. Every regional committee expressed concern about the lack of consistent communication between the National Committee and the regions. To improve communications, NDI suggested that FEMA appoint a national coordinator for regional communication, provide written updates to the regions and promote interregional communication. In response to NDI's recommendations, FEMA created an inter-regional newsletter.

### *NDI Consultations*

NDI consulted with members of the international community on the political situation in Bangladesh. NDI Senior Associate for Election Processes Pat Merloe shared with U.S. Ambassador Merrill some of NDI's experiences that were relevant to the country's polarized political environment. Specifically, he provided information on adjunct participation on national election commissions. The NDI field team in Bangladesh also advised the international community on election-related issues.

Additionally, NDI field representatives met with U S Representative Bill Richardson before his discussion with Prime Minister Zia and Sheikh Hasina in late February 1996

### *February 1996 Elections*

Amid a continuous deterioration of the Bangladeshi political situation that began in late 1995, the Election Commission scheduled new polls for February 15, 1996. In November 1995, the Parliament dissolved, provoking a massive opposition party agitation campaign and calls for the resignation of the prime minister. While the Election Commission had hoped that the parties would reach an agreement by election day, the continuing political impasse prompted the opposition to boycott the polls.

On election day FEMA deployed approximately 1,000 monitors in 55 constituencies. Other coalitions, including the CCHR, also fielded monitors. NDI field representatives visited a total of 20 polling stations in three constituencies in Dhaka. The monitoring groups reported many of the same problems, the most common of which were stolen ballots and/or ballot boxes, ballot stuffing, bombings and fires around polling stations and interference in polling procedures by party supporters. Based on reports from the field, FEMA estimated voter turnout was at more than 15 percent. FEMA additionally observed opposition intimidation and violence and governing party "rigging."

NDI closed its field office in early March 1996. When Institute field representatives returned to Washington, they participated in a series of meetings with NDI senior staff members, USAID and State Department officials, Congressional staff members and Bangladesh embassy officials. NDI also conducted a World Affairs Briefing in its Washington, D C headquarters featuring presentations from the Bangladesh field team. NDI President Wollack moderated the briefing which was attended by government officials, NGO representatives, businesspeople and journalists.

### *June 1996 International Election Observation Mission*

After the Bangladeshi opposition carried out a five-week strike to protest rigging during the February elections, the government called for new elections for June 12, 1996. NDI representatives returned to Bangladesh in early May 1996 to monitor preparations for the elections and the electoral climate, to continue to coordinate with FEMA and other domestic monitors, and to prepare for pre-election assessments. The Institute maintained a continuous presence in the country until late June 1996.

Given the country's political turmoil and the failure of the February 1996 election, the June polling was viewed as a critical test of Bangladesh democracy. To demonstrate continued international support for democratic development in Bangladesh and to promote confidence in the election process, NDI organized a comprehensive international observation program for the June elections. This program complemented NDI's activities providing technical support for FEMA.

NDI's program aimed to review the effectiveness of the electoral administration, assess the elections in relation to Bangladesh law and international norms, deter fraud or manipulation and to expose and denounce fraud should it occur, encourage full acceptance of the results should the elections be deemed legitimate, and provide recommendations that could improve future Bangladesh elections

At the same time, NDI continued to provide technical assistance to FEMA in preparation for the June national elections. The Institute maintained contact with FEMA from Washington and conducted consultations with FEMA leaders when NDI representatives returned to Bangladesh in May. NDI also brought Dr. Nevitte to Bangladesh to assist FEMA during election week. Working closely with FEMA's national leadership and computer staff, Nevitte assessed FEMA's communication and data-analysis systems. He advised FEMA on collecting, transmitting and evaluating information about quality of the elections. NDI also provided technical support to CCHR, sharing information on pre-election monitoring activities, including media monitoring.

In addition to supporting FEMA and the CCHR's election monitoring efforts, NDI coordinated its own election observation with these organizations. In the pre-election period, NDI consulted with FEMA and CCHR representatives on the political situation around the country. FEMA volunteers briefed NDI representatives and introduced them to political leaders and candidates. On election day, NDI observers spoke with FEMA and CCHR observers at polling stations around the country.

From May 10 to 15, 1996, NDI conducted a pre-election assessment mission to Bangladesh in preparation for the June parliamentary elections. The pre-election mission sought to demonstrate the international community's support for a transparent, peaceful and democratic election process in Bangladesh, examine the campaign and political environment, assess preparations for the elections, and discuss with the election commission and the government the terms under which domestic and international observers would operate.

Former U.S. Congressman Stephen Solarz led the NDI team and was accompanied by Manitoba Chief Electoral Officer Richard Balasko, LICADHO Director and Cambodian Movement for Free and Fair Elections co-founder Dr. Pung Chhiv Kek Galabru, NDI Director of Asia Programs Bjornlund, and NDI Cambodia Chief of Mission Peter Manikas.

The delegation met with Chief Advisor to the Caretaker Government Mohammad Hibibur Rahman, President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena, Bangladesh Nationalist Party Chairperson and former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina, Jatiyo Party Acting Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mawlana Nizami, and other political leaders and officials. The delegation also met with Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, leaders of FEMA and the CCHR, journalists, and members of the diplomatic community.

The pre-election team found that Bangladeshi political and civic leaders were concerned about voter registration, illegal arms, "black money" and the role of security forces in the elections. Some complained that their party's supporters had been deliberately disenfranchised by being removed from the voter rolls or that false voters had been added to the list. Political party representatives also reported that illegal arms and black money were being used to influence voters in the pre-election period, and that although the caretaker government was making efforts to retrieve illegal arms and curb vote buying, its actions had not been successful.

From June 2 to 3, 1996, NDI conducted a second pre-election assessment mission to prepare for the election delegation, headed by U.S. Congressman Richardson. He and NDI staff members met with Chief Advisor to the Caretaker Government Rahman, President Biswas, Chief Election Commissioner Hena, Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan, BNP Election Committee Coordinator for International Affairs M.M. Rezaul Karim, Awami League Advisor Shah A.M.S. Kibria, Jatiyo Party Acting Leader Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, Jamaat-e-Islami Spokesman Barrister Abdur Razzaq, as well as several other political leaders and officials. The team also met with leaders of FEMA and members of the diplomatic community.

The second pre-election team found that some of the issues discussed by the first pre-election team had been resolved. There was still concern, however, about the prevalence of illegal arms and black money. Since the first pre-election mission, concerns about the role of security forces had intensified due to events surrounding the president's sacking of the army chief of staff, which revealed instability within the army. The second pre-election mission continued to urge the political parties to restrain their supporters, report complaints and respect the election results if the process were to be deemed fair.

For the elections themselves, a 30-member NDI delegation led by former Congressman Solarz and former Australian Foreign Minister Andrew Peacock observed polling in 36 constituencies in all six divisions and more than half of Bangladesh's 64 districts. The delegation included members of parliament, elections officials, civic and political leaders, and regional experts from 16 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the Americas.

Delegates arrived in Dhaka on June 7 and 8, 1996. NDI conducted detailed briefings on the history and political context for the elections, the key issues in the June elections, the election day actors and procedures, and the Institute's approach to election observing. NDI also arranged briefings for delegates by political party leaders, domestic election monitors, government officials and election commission representatives.

Following these briefings, on June 10, delegates and staff members were deployed in teams of two to three throughout the country. NDI fielded three teams in Dhaka, two teams in Chittagong and one team each in Comilla, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Tangail, Barisal, Faridpur, Khulna, Jessore, Rajshahi, Bogra and Rangpur. While deployed, delegates reported periodically to the NDI office in Dhaka. During this time, NDI also coordinated with other observer groups including the Commonwealth, the European Union and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

While it found certain localized problems on election day, the NDI delegation concluded in its preliminary statement that the election process was “generally peaceful, open and well-administered.” The delegation was “favorably impressed by high turnout and enthusiasm of the voters of Bangladesh” and “heartened that women in particular voted in such large numbers.” The delegation commended the interim government, the election commission and the NGOs involved in voter education and election monitoring.

After the departure of the full delegation, a nine-person team remained to observe re-polling on June 19, 1996. In addition to NDI staff members, delegation leaders Solarz and Peacock as well as delegation member Andrew Ellis participated. The NDI team for the re-polling met again in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country with the president, chief advisor, chief election commissioner, leaders of the political parties, candidates and others.

On June 19, 1996 the delegation divided into five teams that observed the balloting and counting processes in seven constituencies in Chittagong, Comilla, Faridpur and Narayanganj. The delegation also consulted with representatives of the SAARC, Commonwealth and European Union observer groups, who visited a number of other constituencies where re-polling was taking place.

On June 20, 1996, NDI issued a second preliminary statement that again commended the “high turnout and enthusiasm of the voters” and the administration of the process. With one notable exception, the re-polling was peaceful and open, and the enhanced security effectively prevented additional problems.

In July 1996, NDI hosted a briefing in its Washington, D.C. office on the June elections in Bangladesh. NGO representatives, officials from USAID, the State Department and other government agencies and departments, Bangladesh embassy officials, Congressional staff members, journalists and businesspeople attended. At the briefing, Solarz shared his insights on the June elections and the political situation in Bangladesh while Bjornlund described FEMA’s activities and contributions. Delegation members also commented on their observations, focusing on the role of international observers, the high turnout of women, the role of the caretaker government and predictions for future political developments.

#### *June 1996 FEMA Domestic Election Monitoring*

When a new election schedule was announced for June 1996, FEMA immediately activated its network and began preparations for monitoring. Building on skills learned from NDI, FEMA conducted a public awareness and voter education campaign in advance of the June elections. Through candidate fora, theatrical presentations, electronic media spots and motivational rallies, FEMA discouraged electoral fraud, promoted a safe election environment and encouraged voter participation in the democratic process.

Significantly, FEMA organized the largest domestic monitoring efforts in Bangladesh’s history. The group trained and deployed nearly 30,000 volunteer coordinators, couriers and polling station observers on election day.

## *Philippines Study Mission*

USAID funds enabled NDI to include FEMA Member Secretary Tarikul Ghani in the Institute's September 1996 study mission to the elections in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), Philippines. The mission was designed to allow participants to study the Filipino elections process in the ARMM, including the role of NGOs, the government, political parties, media and security forces, as well as the Filipino NGOs' methods of monitoring domestic elections, strengthening government institutions and increasing political participation. Ghani told NDI that he had found the program both useful and educational.

## *NDI Staff Visits to Asia*

From October 30 to November 6, 1996, Bjornlund and NDI Program Assistant Rebecca Kind met in Dhaka with USAID and UNDP representatives, government officials, political party representatives, election officials and FEMA organizers. Through the meetings, NDI gathered information about the September by-elections, learned about FEMA's activities related to the by-elections, the adjudication of grievances and its future plans, and assessed ways in which NDI might support the Bangladeshi parliament.

During their visit to Dhaka, Bjornlund and Kind attended FEMA's "discussion meeting" on its report on the September 5, 1996 by-elections. FEMA brought together its national committee for the meeting and also invited political party representatives, election commission officials and members of the international community. Meeting attendees expressed support for FEMA's work and engaged in an interesting discussion of such topics as the caretaker government concept, campaign finance reform, voter identification cards and autonomy of the electronic media. NDI was impressed by FEMA's ability to engage MPs from across the political spectrum in such a constructive discussion of election issues.

Several organizations and government officials encouraged NDI to engage in work outside of the election context. Suggestions to improve the parliament included deciding how the committees will function, improving the effectiveness of the prime minister's question and answer time, ensuring the fairness and neutrality of the speaker, training newly elected parliamentarians about their responsibilities, and developing a bipartisan approach on important national issues.

## *1997*

### *April 1997 Parliamentary Committee Seminar*

During meetings with NDI representatives in October 1996 and March 1997, Bangladeshi members of parliament, government officials, political party leaders and NGO representatives specifically requested NDI assistance in strengthening parliamentary committees. These requests followed from recommendations made at earlier parliamentary seminars conducted by Bangladesh NGOs and international institutions, including NDI.

On April 27 and 28, 1997, NDI sponsored a seminar on the role and powers of committees in the Bangladesh parliament. The seminar aimed to encourage discussion and possible resolution of disagreements on the composition and chairmanship of committees, and more broadly, to promote constructive dialogue between the governing Awami League and the opposition BNP.

NDI organized the seminar in consultation with the parliamentary secretariat, representatives of the two main political parties and the Center for Analysis and Choice (CAC), a Bangladeshi NGO. International participants shared their experiences and expertise with their Bangladeshi counterparts. Indian Member of Parliament Ajit Jogi, Australian Member of Parliament and former Speaker Leo McLeay, and NDI Governance Consultant Jean Lavoie served as international facilitators.

Approximately 30 Bangladeshis, including ministers, members of parliament and political party leaders, participated in the seminar. Parliamentary secretariat staff members also attended as observers. Participants commented that the seminar provided them with a rare opportunity to engage in a constructive multiparty dialogue on contentious issues relating to the functioning of parliament.

The seminar participants made a number of recommendations concerning the formation and operation of committees in the Bangladesh parliament. The participants found that on many issues, there was little difference between the policies of their respective parties. The most important recommendations included advice on formation of committees, committee membership, chairmanship of committees, committee reports, and staffing and organization.

#### **IV RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

NDI conducted a field-based support program in Bangladesh, designed to assist Bangladeshi civic organizations in encouraging broad-based public participation, deterring intimidation at the polls and creating a climate in which the political will of the electorate would be respected. The Institute's accomplishments in assisting NGO coalition-development, restoring public confidence in the electoral process, and forming an organized system of domestic election monitors included:

- **Establishing and building the institutional capacity of FEMA.** One of the program's most important accomplishments was the establishment and development of FEMA. With NDI's assistance, the SRG brought together various NGOs and other groups interested in monitoring the Bangladeshi general elections in order to form FEMA. NDI aided FEMA in gaining experience in public relations, training techniques, and internal communication. The Institute also helped FEMA conduct election monitoring activities and facilitate exchanges with other Asian monitoring organizations. Ultimately, NDI's assistance led to increased capacity and effectiveness for FEMA.
- **NGO building.** NDI and FEMA cosponsored a domestic election monitoring seminar where FEMA leaders and international participants shared their experiences in election monitoring with the 30 Bangladeshi civic organization representatives. Seminar topics included recruiting, training and organizing volunteers, pre-election monitoring, election day monitoring, conducting a parallel vote tabulation, and post-election monitoring. After this seminar, FEMA leaders and seminar participants organized meetings of NGO leaders throughout Bangladesh, enabling them to establish regional chapters of FEMA.

- **Increased opportunities for FEMA to exchange information** NDI sponsored election observation missions to Thailand and the ARMM, Philippines so that FEMA staff could exchange information and experiences with international election monitors. These activities gave FEMA staff worthwhile practical experience, which they were then able to incorporate into election monitoring activities in Bangladesh.
- **FEMA election monitoring** FEMA successfully recruited, trained, and deployed monitors for several by-elections as well as the February and June 1996 elections. For the February 1996 elections, FEMA deployed approximately 1,000 monitors in 55 constituencies and for the June election, deployed nearly 30,000 volunteer monitors. FEMA observed stolen ballots and/or ballot boxes, ballot stuffing, bombings and fires around polling stations and interference in polling procedures by party supporters.
- **Parallel vote tabulation consultations and use in by-elections** NDI conducted a PVT training workshop and technical session for 23 representatives from ten organizations and coalitions in January 1995. This was the first large meeting of NGOs interested in forming a coalition to monitor the upcoming general elections. Following these sessions, the SRG was able to employ some of NDI's PVT techniques during the January municipal and by-elections.
- **Encouraged political parties to adhere to a code of conduct for elections** At FEMA's request, NDI developed a code of conduct for Bangladeshi political parties, which FEMA implemented before the elections to encourage fair election practices.
- **Non-partisan nature of domestic election monitoring** Also at FEMA's request, NDI developed a pledge of non-partisanship for all election monitors to sign as well as a list of guidelines for all monitors to follow. FEMA then promoted these guidelines during the election process.
- **International election observer mission** NDI organized two pre-election assessment missions to Bangladesh in the months leading up to the June 1996 elections as well as election day monitoring and a post-election assessment. This mission served to bolster domestic monitoring efforts, providing additional technical assistance to FEMA.
- **Increased public confidence in the electoral system** Although FEMA faced significant public skepticism entering the June 1996 elections, the Alliance gained widespread confidence in its role to monitor elections and instilled public confidence in the electoral system as a whole. This remarkable support for FEMA and democratic elections can be attributed to the Alliance's extensive public relations activities and efficient internal organization, both of which NDI helped improve.
- **Parliamentary Committees Seminar** Approximately 30 Bangladeshis, including ministers, members of parliament and political party leaders, participated in the April 1997 seminar. Participants commented that the seminar provided them with a rare opportunity to engage in a constructive multiparty dialogue on contentious issues relating to the functioning of the

parliament. The participants found that on many issues, there was little difference between the policies of their respective parties. Ultimately, the seminar participants made recommendations regarding formation of committees, committee membership, chairmanship of committees, committee reports, and staffing and organization.

## V CONCLUSION/EVALUATION

This program displayed the importance of establishing credibility and rapport between NDI, its local partners, and other organizations within a program country. NDI's long history of pre-election work with numerous political parties across the political spectrum gave it a high level of credibility to monitor elections and hold public officials accountable for their actions in Bangladesh. Regarding NGOs, FEMA gained credibility from its inception by incorporating large, respected and neutral Bangladeshi organizations that had been active in community and social work.

Further, FEMA's establishment and growth lends valuable insight into the management and function of a successful domestic monitoring organization. From its inception, NDI helped FEMA establish a stable organizational structure that maintains communication and support among the Alliance's workers. This communication was especially important during elections. Further, FEMA's courage in releasing critical reports of the election process prompted other members of society to come forward with their own concerns and complaints about the elections. Throughout its history, FEMA has benefitted from the opportunities NDI gives it to study and meet with international election monitoring and political participation efforts. FEMA staff ultimately incorporate the information and experience they gather in these international situations in their Bangladesh programs.

While NDI's programs in Bangladesh were ultimately successful, the Institute shifted its focus in 1995 due to *hartals*, strikes and opposition boycotts of parliament. The resultant election monitoring program was both appropriate and successful in the Bangladeshi political environment. This experience illustrates that NDI programs in Bangladesh, and other unstable democracies, must be prepared for rapid and unforeseen changes in their timetable and activities. Effective programs must be flexible so that funds and activities can be adjusted according to the country's conditions.