Experience of a first time voter

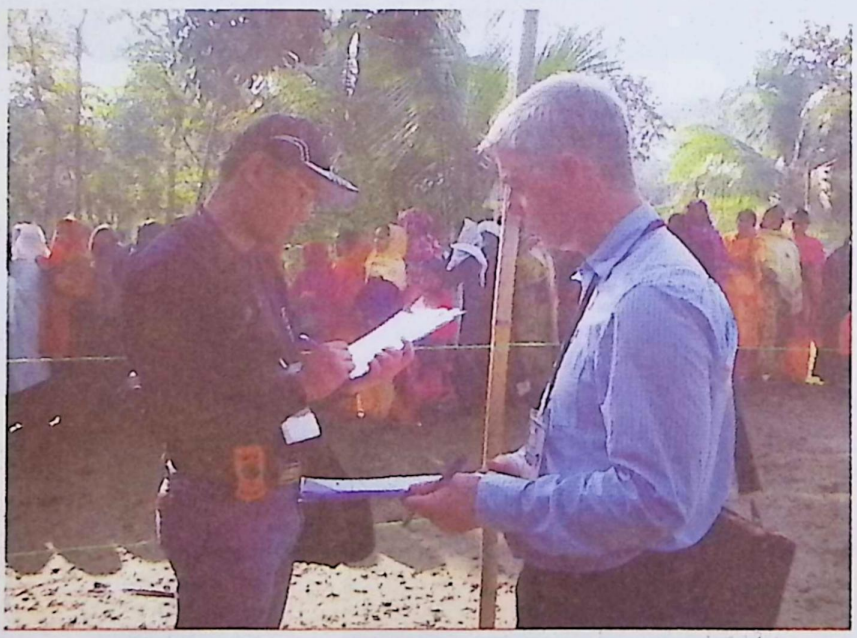
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WHEN I came to know that I could not cast my vote this time, definitely I was disappointed. But on the other side, I was happy too to be a part of IRI's (International Republican Institute) election observation process. I am talking about the 13th of November when I went for the translators' briefing session of IRI. On that day I was informed that I would be going to Khulna with a short term observing team.

Accordingly, after my semester final was over, I started buying warm clothes and started to read election rules. In the meantime, election was postponed for 10 days. Hence, in the early morning of 27th December I reached Radisson Hotel which was the IRI headquarter during election time. There I was introduced to the two observers I would be working with. Samnang Chhim who was a Cambodian came to observe our city corporation election last year but it was the first time in Bangladesh for Canadian observer John Lewis. So the four member team, two observers, one translator and one driver set off from Radisson at 8:30am. We reached hotel Western Inn of Khulna at 2pm. In the meantime, we had some light snacks, had lots of sight seeing and taking photographs. We crossed Padma on a ferry which was quite foggy but both of the observers enjoyed it.

In the hotel, the long-term team and the field coordinator of IRI was waiting for us. We checked in, had some rest and at 4pm I and our driver sat with the long term team translator, driver and field coordinator. I came to know that we would cover the neighboring district Bagerhat on the Election Day. I was given the contact numbers of DC, SP, DEO of Bagerhat and also of the candidates' number among whom Sheikh Hasina was the candidate in Bagerhat-1. Seeing that, even John was thrilled during the evening meeting with long term observers! I was also provided with the maps and details of all the polling stations of four upazillas of Bagerhat that we would be covering.

On 28th, we met with the DC, SP, DEO and UNO of Bagerhat. IRI field coordinator Sanchita Ray was accompanying us. She was very helpful and without her it would have been pretty challenging to meet with such busy persons on the day before election. We visited the two polling stations where they would observe the opening of the poll next day. We also saw the election control room in DC office where hourly results would reach through telephone from nine upazillas of Bagerhat. Samnang found it better than his country's election process. In the UNO office, presiding officers were called and handed with election materials. After work, we visited the two famous places of Bagerhat, Majar of Khan Jahan Ali and Shat Gombuj Mashjid. Here, John noticed that we four were from four different religions and so a picture was a must! All of us were delighted noticing such a combination. That day we reached hotel quite early. I had already started enjoying being alone in a luxurious room. In those days, my first work after reaching my room was to turn on the tv and read the menu.



On the Election Day, I woke up at 5:15am and we set off at around 6:30am. Khulna was too foggy to see anything at early dawn. The observers wanted to see the opening of a polling station. So we reached a station an hour before the poll started. Throughout the day, we visited ten polling stations. I have learned plenty in two days of my stay there which I shall remember all my life.

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