

Women barred from voting

ECP URGED TO DECLARE POLLS NULL AND VOID

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In its initial report on election monitoring, Aurat Foundation, a non-governmental organisation, has urged the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to declare polls null and void in constituencies where women were barred from voting.

Over 100 women domestic election observers of Aurat Foundation monitored election activities from gender perspective throughout the day at 553 women polling stations in major cities of Pakistan in collaboration with international monitors of Gender Concerns International (GCI).

Long queues of women voters, particularly large number of young voters, were witnessed at the polling stations. This shows an anticipated high election turnout and increased participation of women in elections, particularly on the polling day.

The report says in Sargodha, women voted for the first time in history in union councils Lilliani and Moazamabad. There were reports of widespread violations of women's electoral rights in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where they were barred from voting forcibly through political party agreements or under threatening circumstances.

In Upper Dir women were barred from voting in the entire district and

only one woman was able to cast her vote in UC Darora. In Lower Dir women were stopped from voting in seven constituencies, and in Buner district women were not allowed to vote in 17 UCs. Women were also barred from voting in several constituencies in Mardan, DI Khan, Nowshera, Batagram and Malakand. Aurat Foundation called upon the ECP to declare elections null and void in these constituencies due to this flagrant violation of election rules and code of ethics.

Security situation at women polling stations was satisfactory. Women police personnel were seen only at a few places, however, male police and other security arrangements were adequate.

Women voters' knowledge about vote-casting procedure was of average nature in urban centres, however, in rural areas and in rural suburbs of cities women generally lacked information about voting. The ECP's SMS facility in vote tracking was benefitted by literate women voters, in cities, however, many voters even in cities and mostly in rural areas had to approach political party camps for getting polling booth's code number and serial number of vote.

The environment of transparency in vote-casting in the polling booths saw much improvement and the system of checks and balances in the procedure of vote-casting made overall environment voter-friendly.