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GEM REPORT INDICATES HIGH WOMEN VOTER TURNOUT

ISLAMABAD

APP

The Gender Election Monitoring (GEM) mission on Monday issued its preliminary report on female electoral participation, finding that a large proportion of Pakistan's women came out to vote on May 11.

"Despite pre-election threats and attacks, a large number of female voters from all age groups showed up enthusiastically to cast their votes, said GEM Mission Head Sabra Bano,

-Addressing a press conference she informed that women voted for the first time in the history of Sargodha, Lilliani and Moazzamabad.

She said that the Gender Concerns International's GEM mission in partnered with the Aurat Foundation to depute 110 observers, both international and local, to monitor the elections from a gender perspective at 555 female polling stations all over Pakistan.

GEM's Election observations were conducted in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Swabi, Kohat, Swat, Abbottabad, Mardan, Lower Dir, Hyderabad, Thatta, Sargodha, Bhakkar, Vehari and

Gujranwala. The team included Sabra Bano and Deputy Mission Head Magda De Meyer, who have also monitored elections in Libya (2012), Morocco (2011), Tunisia (2011) and Pakistan (2008).

According to Bano, political agents seemed to have hijacked the administrative

Staff's tasks in some polling stations, and they "guided" female voters in the polling process. Campaigning was also being done inside the polling stations.

In Upper Dir only one woman was able to vote while in Lower Dir, women were stopped from voting in seven constituencies. In Buner, women were disallowed to vote in 17 Union Councils (UCs). The same situation arose in several constituencies in Mardan, Dera Ismail Khan, Nowshera, Batgram and Malakand.

Bano acknowledged the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP)'s efforts to reach out to female voters by setting up as many polling stations as possible so that fewer women would experience transportation difficulties.

The 8300 Short Messaging Service (SMS) facility to locate one's polling station and constituency also proved helpful to young and literate women voters.