

PRC: An approach for Strengthening Local Government

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The origin of local government in Bangladesh can be traced back to more than 125 years when the British Government in India passed the Chowkidari Panchayet Act, 1974. They look after the interest of village people and collect taxes with the assistance of Chowkidaris. The system was handed down to Pakistan and India at their independence in 1947. The local government system remained essentially the same for a long time until the basic Democracies system was introduced by the President's order No.18, 1959, by President Ayub Khan. The Basic Democracies System (BD) provided for a four tier local government: Union Council, Thana Council, District Council and the Divisional Council. After independence in 1971 BD system were dissolved by the government of Bangladesh vide president Order on the Dissolution and Administration of Local Bodies (1972). Meanwhile the constitution of the Country was adopted in late 1972, Article 9,10,11,59 and 60 describes and provided for an elected local government and its purposes.

Recently the 7th Union Parishad Election was held in this Country. People and voters were so enthusiastic at that time. But this is very unfortunate that the fate of people couldn't change. The Condition of UP's like administration, management, official and service delivery system are so poor. Even the people don't have any connection with local representatives, which will facilitate people to obtain better services. That's why Union Parishad is not able to play very effective role in the country.

Democracywatch-a civil society organization took the initiative to make a bridge between people and local UP representatives through Peoples Reporting Centre (PRC) situated in union levels. Even they will monitor the activities of UP's and make a report with recommendations. Finally they will go for advocacy to find out the ways and means to resolve these problems.

People's Reporting Centre-is a platform where a group of workers of Democracywatch will work over there. They will form 3 to 5 citizen committees in each union parishad's. These Committees are groups of 10 to 12 people from different backgrounds and viewpoints who meet regularly to discuss a particular issue of UP activity. Local Senior People, Public Leaders, School or College teachers, Imams, NGO activists, Doctors will be members of the committee. Through this committee Democracywatch will conduct different type of awareness and motivational campaign on Union Parishad. Finally a monitoring forms will be circulated to asses the performances of UP's. This will be the first time when local people are going to monitor their own UP's performances. They will report to PRC office. PRC office will consolidate these reports and send it to media and concerned authorities. Finally PRC will go for Advocacy to resolve these problems. Initially Democracywatch is working in 6 Unions (Fatehpur and Ramnagar union of Jessore, Singra and Bulakipur union of Dinajpur, Bason of Gazipur and Khogakhoribari of Nilphamari).

The Executive Director of Democracywatch Taleya Rehman said that it is a unique initiative taken by Democracywatch this year. In Bangla We named it as 'Jonogoner Dorbar' that is people's meeting. Through this initiative we want to encourage people to participate in their local affairs, which are being conducted by their local government. Democracy means people's rule but our people do not have any roles besides casting their votes at elections. This initiative is designed to make them realise that the government has to be accountable to people. They have the right to ask questions as to why they are deprived of their basic human rights that is mentioned so boldly in our constitution. At

these Janogoner Dorbar people will not only report the failing of local govt why it has been so and what can be done to readdress it. She also added, that Jonogoner Dorber will encourage participation of people in the democratic process.

Actually the aim of PRC is to establishing a local monitoring system and to asses the performances of UPs. But in this process the role of local people will be very effective. If this monitoring system establish in UP level definitely a group of catalyst will be formed and side-by-side local citizens will act as contributors in the local development process.

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