

Upazila Parishad: A Centre for Development or a Battleground of Power? A Contemporary Analysis of Conflicts and Controversies

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Abstract

Upazila Parishad is inevitable for rural development and socio-economic empowerment but unfortunately there is confusion, debate, discussion and argument in favour or against Upazila. Since independence in 1971, successive governments have tried to use the local government system for their own political interest. The regime in power wanted to make the local government representatives for their power base and manipulated the system. The recent caretaker government of Bangladesh promulgated the Upazila Parishad Ordinance in 2008 to establish representative local government system and members of the parliament were removed from the advisory role of Upazila Parishad. The newly elected Awami League government decided to revoke Upazila Parishad Ordinance of 2008 and restore the position of MPs, which has weakened Upazila Parishad. This paper makes an attempt to better understand the evolution of the Upazila system in Bangladesh, mainly tries to draw a fresh picture of present Upazila Parishad conflicts and controversies and some arguments. Besides, there are also some alarming recommendations to strengthen the Upazila Parishad. Interestingly enough, this paper focuses on ongoing remarks regarding Upazila Parishad. This paper highlights the opinion of various thinkers as well as the speeches of policy makers and local government bodies. All the information and opinion of this paper based on articles, books, journals, newspapers, magazines and lastly the web site.

Keywords: Upazilla, Local Government, Governance, Efficiency.

Introduction

Bangladesh has the parliamentary form of government; the prime minister is the chief executive of the country. He/she has council of ministers, who assist him/her in the duties depending on the bureaucrats. For the convenience of government and to run the administration smoothly, the country is divided into seven administrative divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Barisal, Khulna, Sylhet and newly formed

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Rongpur. Each division placed under a divisional commissioner. Subsequently each division is then sub divided into Zilas (Districts). There are 64 districts. The administration of each district is headed by a deputy commissioner (DC) assisted by other officials. Afterwards each district consists of several thanas (Upazila). There are 483 thanas (Upazila). Thereafter, thanas are unions, which are followed by several villages. There are about 4403 unions.

The divisional level is the highest tier of administration following the national level. The Divisional Commissioner plays a supervisory role over all the departments and agencies in the Division. The District has been the focal point in the administrative system. When construction is small scale, it falls under the jurisdiction of the Thana or Upazila administration. The administrative head of the Thana is known the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) or Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO). The District and Thana/Upazila executives are assisted by a large number of officials as well as professional and technical personnel. The most important thing is that local government in urban and rural areas is entrusted to bodies elected by the people by competitive elections. Such bodies are known as Pourashavas or City Corporations and Municipalities in urban areas, and Upazila Parishads, Zila Parishads and Union Parishads in rural areas.

The Upazila Parishad (UP) is undoubtedly an important tier of local government, has significant potential to bring the government closer to the people. The Upazila Parishad Ordinance (1982) was promulgated with a hope to enhance the government to the grass root level. The UP did not last long (1985-1991) and ended with the fall of the military-turn-civil regime headed by Lt General Ershad, which is recently declared 'illegal government by the supreme court of Bangladesh'.² Recently in the age of democratic government after a 19 years pause, election has taken place in high spirits at the Upazila level in 2009, which turn over a new leaf in the history of democratic Bangladesh. When Bangladesh is over head and ears for functioning of the newly elected Upazila Parishad as a free and independent local body, the old issue of power sharing between the local MP and UP chairman once again came into existence. At present UP became a dead letter and the purpose of strengthening the local government went in vain by different conflicts and controversies among the UP Chairman, Vice Chairman, Members of Parliament and Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO).

The age-old Local Government: Evolution and Origin of Upazila Parishad (UP):

The local government system in Bangladesh is very ancient. Historically, local government always existed in Bengal. There is evidence of some forms of village self-government in the oldest Hindu religious writing,

² The Daily Bangladesh Potidin, 15-09-2010.

“the Rig Veda” written in approximately 1200 B.C. (*Siddiqui, 2005*). From the medieval period it was called Panchayet. A ruler named Sher Saha had divided Bengal in the form of Pargana, which is an example of medieval local government.

Therefore, the current system of local government owes its origin to British colonialism in the sub-continent. The Chawkidari Panchayet Act of 1870 was the initial step towards this direction and was designed to maintain peace in the village areas. Thus, the Local Self-Government Act 1885, the Village Self-Government Act 1919, as well as the Basic Democracy Order 1959 laid down the foundation of the system of local government in Bangladesh.

After Bangladesh was formed the new government of Sheikh Mujib abolished the old system and introduced Union Panchayet by an executive order (IGO, 1972) and later the name was changed to Union Parishad in 1973. After the changes of government in 1976, General Zia government promulgated a new local government ordinance, provided for a three tier system of local government i) Union Parishad for a Union, ii) Thana Parishad for a Thana, and, iii) Zila Parishad for a District. In 1978, a new body was created at the village level called the Gram Sarkar (Village government).

In the march of 1982, General Ershad captured state power through a bloodless coup and Martial law was clamped upon the country. In July 1982 the Local Government Ordinance, the Swanirvar Gram Sarker (self-reliant village government) was abolished and a major change was also initiated through the introduction of the Local Government Ordinance in 1982 (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization). As a result, 460 thanas of the country were upgraded and renamed as Upazila (Sub-district) in 1983 by an ordinance. Upazila as an upgraded form of thana was made the focal point of local development administration (*Md. Awal Hossain*). In 1991 the Khaleda Zia government abolished the UP by an executive order. In 1996, Awami League formed government with commitments in the election manifesto to develop a strong, decentralization, effective local government system but they didn't restore Upazila system.

Khaleda Zia government of 2001 to 2006 was in favour of introducing the Local Self Government and proposed Gram Sarker (Village Government) at village level. After that, the issue of strengthening the local government came up strongly during the two-year (2006-2008) long military backed or supported caretaker government (CTG) of Dr. Fakhruddin. This government promulgated the Upazila Parishad Ordinance in 2008 with an aim to conduct Upazila election and created a Local Government Commission. Subsequently, according to the ordinance, MPs were removed from the advisory role and two new

elected positions of Vice Chairpersons were created (of which one must be a woman). The ordinance also reserved 30% seats for the women (*As-Saber, S.N. & Rabbi, M.F. 2009*). Under this ordinance, election was held in almost all the 480 Upazilas of the country on January 22, 2009. Later, the newly elected Awami League government decided to revoke again Upazila Parishad Ordinance 2008 and scrapped the Local Government Commission. Accordingly, a bill was passed in the parliament on the 6th of April 2009 by reinstating MPs as advisors of the Parishad.

Constitutional and Legal Basis of Local Government:

In any democratic polity, local government is given legal recognition either by an act of Parliament or by incorporation of relevant provisions in the Constitution (*Khan, 1996: 1*).

Bangladesh's Constitution of 1972 clearly spelt out the legal basis of local government;

Article 9 of the Constitution provides “the state shall encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned” (*Ishrat Ali*).

Article 11 corroborates people participation, “the Republic shall be a democracy in which effective participation by people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured (*Ishrat Ali*).

Article 59, Chapter III of the Constitution states that, 'Local government in every administrative unit of the Republic shall be entrusted to bodies composed of persons elected in accordance with law' (*Pranab Kumar Panday*).

According to Article 59(1), the local government bodies in every administrative unit of the republic are the major actors of all sorts of local development works. Yes, the parliament has something to do for the local government and this is also defined in our constitution (*Md. Anwarul Kabir*).

Article 60 of the Constitution states 'for the purpose of giving full effect to the provision of article fifty nine, Parliament shall, by law, confer powers on the local government bodies referred to in that article including power to impose taxes for local purposes, to prepare their budgets and to maintain funds' (Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh, as modified up to 30th of November, 1998). (*Pranab Kumar Panday*)

Article 65(1) of the constitution, MPs are vested with legislative powers of the Republic and so their supreme obligation is to formulate, modify various legislations with a view to administering country in

righteous ways following the people's aspiration as the Article 7(1) confirms that all powers in the republic belong to the people (*Md. Anwarul Kabir*).

Upazila Parishad act 2009, A SLAP to Democracy:

Upazilla Parishad is a downright useful institution for empowering people and strengthening democracy. Bangladesh has been striving to establish representative local government system which is closer to people, responsive to their needs and accountable for its deeds by UP. The caretaker government of Bangladesh promulgated the Upazila Parishad Ordinance in 2008 and created a Local Government Commission to oversee the activities and performance of the Parishad. According to the ordinance, members of the parliament were removed from the advisory role of UP.

It is unfortunate that Awami League government under a new Ordinance and legislative framework decided to restore Upazila Parishad Ordinance of 2008 and abolished the Local Government Commission. Subsequently, on 6th of April 2009 a bill was passed in the parliament, by which all efforts for empowering people and strengthening democracy fell flat.

As reported in a national daily, according to clauses 1 and 2 of Article 25 of the Act, MPs will be advisors of their respective UPs and their advices should be treated as mandatory as ascribed in the original UP Act 1998. Besides, as per these clauses UPs must not communicate with the government directly without prior notice to the concerned MPs (*Md. Anwarul Kabir*).

Moreover, the clause 27 (kha) of the Act dictates that after each session of the UP, minutes of the session must be submitted to their respective MPs within 14 days. In essence, instead of nurturing democracy, this Act has made UPs fully accountable to their respective MPs. This, in turn, will promote the autocracy in the psyche of the respective MPs in the UP (*Md. Anwarul Kabir*).

According to the new act of 2009, Upazila Nirbahi officers will be the presidents of standing committees instead of secretaries.

The circular gives the UNO the authority to prepare a number of reports as well as the Annual Confidential Report of the council officials.

UP is obviously crucial for strong local government for strengthening democracy at the grass-root level as well as in the national level. Needless to say that Upazila system was introduced to ensure people participation in the activities of government through their elected representative. But unfortunately after promulgation of Upazila Parishad Act 2009, UP has now turned into a decorative tier of local government which is undoubtedly a slap for our democracy.

Conflicts and Controversies Regarding Upazilla Parishad:

The controversy over the power of the Upazila Parishad has generated serious debate in the political and civil arenas of Bangladesh. As a result meetings, seminars, symposia, rallies, press conferences and even litigations in the court of law are taking place. With the advent of Upazila Parishad act 2009, it became talk of the town. Still this issue is a hot cake in the table of discussion. This conflicts and controversy is not new. If we look backward, the history of UP has amazing conclusion in all regimes. The policy makers are always between cup and leap regarding UP.

‘Professor Mohabbat opined that former-president Hussain Mohammed Ershad took the idea from the report and he used the idea in order to enable his own gain, like Ayub Khan’s basic democracy.’ Professor Mohabbat also added, ‘When Ershad failed to get political affiliation at the national level he introduced Upazilla to get validation in politics from the grass root level’.³

Debate and discussion continued throughout the decades about Upazila system. At the very beginning people evaluate Upazila as a politics of Ershad to stay in power for long time.

Husain Imam, a columnist said, “IF General Ershad in his nine-year military, quasi-military rule did one good thing, it was his introduction of the Upazila system. At that time, his critics thought it simply a ploy to consolidate his autocratic rule all over the country, the way Field Marshal Ayub Khan tried by introducing the so-called “Basic Democracy” in the country. Whatever might have been the intention of General Ershad, the system worked for the better”.⁴

‘Unfortunately, after the formation of Upazillas back in 1985, it was not implemented positively; rather it was a political move. For this reason a conflict between Upazilla Chairmen and MPs materialised,’ explains Professor Zarina Rahman Khan from the Department of Public Administration, Dhaka University.⁵

In 2009, elections are certainly more important because the rules have been changed and give the elected chairman the final say over matters concerning his Upazilla. The local MP is removed from the advisory position and will not be permitted to assert any dominance over the matters of Upazila Parishad any longer. This means that a local MP might even have to work with a chairman who supports, or is a member of a rival party. But unfortunately present government amended Upazila Ordinance and made MPs the advisors of the Parishad which increases the complexity of the Upazila Parishad.

³ Government Matters: Dyuti Monishita and Mohiuddin Alamgir, New Age Extra, January 23-29, 2009.

⁴ Resuscitating Upazila Parishads, Husain Imam, Bangladesh Today, 04-06-2009.

⁵ Government Matters: Dyuti Monishita and Mohiuddin Alamgir, New Age Extra, January 23-29, 2009.

At present there are 3 (three) types of conflict in the Upazila System, these are the following:

- i) Member of Parliament (MP) versus Upazila Chairman: MP thinks themselves as the boss or superior in local government. On the other hand Upazila Chairman considers MP as a competitor.

Harun-ur-Rashid Hawlader, convener of Bangladesh Upazila Parishad Association and chairman of Dumki Upazila under Patuakhali said, 'Bureaucracy and the superior attitude of MPs towards the Upazila is democracy's enemy in the country'.⁶

Upazila Chairman of Chandpur Sadar M. Yusuf Gazi in a reaction stated that so approved Upazila Parishad Act did not open the opportunity for Upazila Chairman to pay respect at the graveyard and attend at the invitation at the dinner without the approval of the MP.⁷

- ii) Upazila Chairman versus Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO): Upazila chairman argue that UNO don't co-operate with the UP bodies. They deny their instruction and they have nothing to say in the Upazila administration.

Abdul Mazid Photo, convenor of the Upazila Chairman Oikya Parishad and chairman of Satoria Upzila under Manikganj district said in a press conference,

"The UNOs don't coordinate with the chairmen and vice- chairmen for accomplishing any work of the Upazila and this attitude undermines the image of the elected representatives,"

Photo also said, "The UNOs are doing all development works of the Upazila consulting with the local MP and the role of Upazila chairman and vice chairman are only the audience".⁸

On the other hand, Upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) 'do not like the idea of working under the authority of the chairmen,' according to official sources.⁹

- iii) Vice-chairman versus Upazila chairman and UNO: Vice-chairman is one of the crucial positions of the UP but they have conflict somewhere with the chairman and somewhere with the UNO. Vice-chairmen are sitting idle as their task is not specified in the new law.

Biswanath Upazila Parishad vice-chairman Angura Begum said, 'I am elected by 55,000 votes not to sit idle. If the new rules do not specify the task of vice-chairman, it is absolutely unacceptable as we are committed to work for the people'.¹⁰

⁶ The New Age, July 23-29, New Age Extra.

⁷ Weekly Holiday Metropolitan, 24-04-2009.

⁸ Bangladesh Today, 22-08-2010.

⁹ The New Age Bangladesh, 06-05-2009 , via www.bd64.com

¹⁰ Ibid.

Other way, vice-chairmans are not getting any position in the Upazila administration because of non co-operation from the UNOs.

Noor Alam, vice chairmen of the Mongla Upazila in Bagherhat district said, 'Bureaucrats are another hindrance as, according to the law, at least 14 committees need to be chaired by the vice chairmen. But in reality, nothing of the sort exists'.¹¹

Nowadays, the decentralisation of power to the Upazila levels has been a topic of debates over the years. There are significant movements by local government representatives, various discussions amongst civil society members, government and non-government institutions, researchers, policymakers, practitioners and donors.

While the constitution of the country guarantees the decentralisation of authority to local government but unfortunately it continues to be hindered by the lawmakers, bureaucrats and government authorities.

"The objective of the constitution, is governing of the local areas by the local representatives which was also observed in the case of Kudrat-E-Elahi Panir Vs. Bangladesh in the following terms: "It is meant for management of local affairs by locally elected persons. If government officers or their henchmen are brought to run the local bodies, there is no sense in retaining them as Local Government Bodies (Ershadul Alam)".¹²

In the same way, "the High Court on 08-11-2009 has asked the government why the MPs should not be removed as advisers to the UP, a local government body.

The bench of justices Mohammad Anwarul Haque and A H M Shamsuddin Chowdhury issued the order on a petition filed by three Upazila chairmen of Manikganj. It asked the government why the provision of appointing the MPs as advisers to UP and their approval in the planning of development programme should not be declared illegal. It also asked the government why the provision of keeping the UNOs presidents of standing committees instead of secretaries should not be declared illegal".¹³

The local-level representatives alleged that in spite of strengthening the local government, the bureaucrats and the people's representatives are more inclined towards crippling the important local bodies and the representatives' workforces due to their corruption and financial interest.

In fact, the allotment of Tk.15 crore to each MP and implementation of some projects by the UNO are schemes for empowering the central government where as the existence of local government is under threat. Such in-cooperative attitude of government clearly states that government or the political parties are not friendly to strengthen the local government.

¹¹ The New Age Bangladesh, New Age Extra, July 23-29

¹² The Daily Star, 21-08-2010.

¹³ Dhaka, 08-11-2009, bdnews24.com

“Most of our allocation is gobbled up through corruption as we have to manage Upazila officials for the cheques,” says Ataharul, a UP chairman. He also alleged that allocation for their office is being ‘gripped’ by the lawmakers although lawmakers have ‘special allocation’ for ensuring the implementation of their activities. From 381 tonnes of TR as general allocation for my area, around 100 tonnes were taken away by the local lawmaker and Awami league leaders”.¹⁴

The elected local government representatives are also annoyed with the fact that the Upazila chairmen do not have any authority of appointment and disciplinary actions, if needed, against the officials either deputed to or placed at the disposal of Upazila Parishads, according to the UP Chairman and Vice-Chairman (Responsibilities and Financial Facilities) Rules 2010. They also don’t have the scope to evaluate the performances of Upazila level civil servants through annual confidential report (ACR).

Recently, the UP Chairmen are giving ultimatum to the government to resolve the problems of Upazila otherwise they all together will resign from their position. On the other hand UNOs are also expressing same ultimatum to the government. In this circumstances government formed a national committee where cabinet secretary Abdul Aziz NDC is the chairman, to resolve this problem. It is listened from a source of ministry that UNOs are the victim by executing MPs order. UNOs have nothing to do because MPs are giving them various development lists (Bangladesh Potidin, 23-08-2010).

These are the present scenario of our local government system. Local administration is facing problems as the local administrators and lawmakers were holding meetings following the directives from the central administration by avoiding the Upazila chairmen. Interestingly enough, the most important thing is that each side fears that interference from the other side might debar them from fulfilling their commitments.

Argument in Favour or Against:

There are lot of argument in favour or against these conflicts and controversies; some significant arguments are pointed out below.

The people vote for MP and make them policy maker but MPs has an election mandate of local development. If they don’t have any position in the UP they have limited scope of doing something for their voters.

Dr. Abul Kalam Azad is a Professor of Economics at the University of Chittagong opined that,

“The MP will make laws! In the National Parliament laws are legislated for the whole country -- not for any particular area. Why will

¹⁴ The Daily Star, 31-08-2010.

the voters of a particular area vote for a person who will make laws for the whole country?”

If the MPs are removed of power to manage the development works of their respective constituencies, they will lose the local acceptances of the voters in their own constituency.

Local government is the government-below or a government which is organised locally. UP is about local leadership, building strong communities and ensuring the wellbeing and an institution for empowering people and strengthening democracy.

Ershadul Alam is an advocate and researcher said,

“Participation of the chairman in development activities is necessary as he, being a resident of the locality, is aware of the kind of development projects needed for the area within his jurisdiction. The chairman can also play an active role in establishing rule of law in his area”.

Similarly Professor Zarina Rahman said, “MPs will concentrate on foreign policy, economy, law-making and Upazilla Chairmen will concentrate on social and cultural development, and building roads, bridges, and culverts on a local level”.¹⁵

The Chairmen maintain a stronger and direct relation with the common mass. A notification empowered the UNOs to be the Chairman of Law & Order Committee for concerned Upazila. Question may arise who knows better the law & order situation in an Upazila? Chairman or UNO? It's obviously the Chairman who has a continuous, close and stronger relation with each of the villages of his/her Upazila”, said by Md. Isharat Ali.

The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is a representative of the central government in the local government. UNOs have to prepare budget, plan for development, prepare project documents, implement projects, must go through the auditing process and so on.

Kazi S.M. Khasrul Alam Quddusi expressed,

“The UNOs, who are representatives of the central government at the Upazila level, have definitely been doing a superb job of coordinating the activities of various departments at the Upazila level. The level of sophistication of most of the UNOs is also highly commendable”.

To implement the central government development plans successfully and smoothly the role of UNOs undoubtedly significant.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath said,

“There is no apparent legal reason to such a motion except downgrading the bureaucracy to the dust. It is true whenever bureaucracy

¹⁵ Government Matters: Dyuti Monishita and Mohiuddin Alamgir, New Age Extra, January 23-29, 2009.

is undermined, efficiency must be comprised which eventually shatter the image of a government”.¹⁶

Whatever might be the argument in favour or against, the recent rows over powers or hierarchy in the Upazilla have weakened this institution. If this conflict of interest is not ended, the whole institution of local government could collapse and the development goal of central government will go in vain.

Recommendations:

Local government is organized on the spirit of decentralization, is obviously a subsystem of greater political system of a country which has roots of democracy. Bangladesh is a multi party democratic country and all the activities of the country depend on the candour of the political parties. If political party want, they can take any initiative to make a strong local government body like Upazila Parishad. The ruling political party has two third majorities in the parliament, they can easily take any attempt to strengthen the Upazila Parishad. It is just the political will of the government. On the contrary the opposite political parties have to raise their voice in the favour of Upazila chairman and have to force the government to solve the ongoing problem of Upazila Parishad. There must be a national consensus among the different power holders. Without democratic setup at the national level, the government institutions both central and local, cannot grow and develop in the real.

Professor Anwar said,

“If we want a strong and effective local government, then political will is a must and in order to achieve smooth democracy, the practice of local government is also a must”.¹⁷

The objectives have to improve local government performance is essential through a stronger financial position and increasingly effective public service delivery, financial administrative and managerial capacity. Local capacity is one of the most important factors creating a well-functioning UP services.

Professor Mohabbat said,

‘We need self-local government, but not the kind of local government where bureaucrats and central government control every aspect of the local governments. If we want a strong local government, then infrastructure development and economic solvency is obligatory’.¹⁸

Civil service reform is usually a supporting strategy for strengthening the local government operations. Reform of the civil service therefore is

¹⁶ Weekly Holiday Metropolitan 24-04-2009.

¹⁷ Government Matters: Dyuti Monishita and Mohiuddin Alamgir, New Age Extra, January 23-29, 2009.

¹⁸ Ibid.

the process of modifying rules to obtain a more efficient, dedicated and performing local government. To implement the central government master plan civil servants have to be cordial and friendly with the Upazila chairman.

Another important thing, interferences of the central government in the local government issues should be clearly and permanently removed.

Professor Zarina clarified, 'Local Government Rural Development (LGRD) Ministry will not interfere in the works of the Upazilla for the better function of the local government'.¹⁹

As a matter of fact, the authority and responsibility of local self-government bodies should go hand in hand. Their day to day working must be free from official direction and they must have the power to initiate any development project without any complexity of central recommendation.

Decentralization of powers and functions to local government bodies should not be in paper rather specific policies and directions should be triggered or in action for strong local government bodies. In this way, officials and local leader's cooperation with each other can turn over a new leaf in Upazila Parishad. The central government should develop the physical infrastructure, transportation facilities, communication networks, roads, resource mobilize, supervise field personnel and distribute services, to carry out development responsibilities at the local level, which lead to an interaction among local and central government.

A policy of "sharing" or 'transfer' of functions and power between the center and Upazila Parishad is extended to the local government units. The center has to divert many more of its functions to the local government to make a strong and powerful Upazila Parishad. The central government must have to allocate appropriate resources technical support to the localities in terms of financial and human capital.

The most important thing is that the leaders in central ministries, MPs who are the critical players, civil servants, opposite political parties' leaders, interest groups and local units of administration should muster strong and have to work unitedly to resolve the ongoing conflicts and controversies regarding UP.

Conclusion:

There is an elaborate system of local government in the constitution of Bangladesh. Local government, as a political institution to ensure public participation in development activities is not yet take proper shape in Bangladesh. The local government like UP as we find it today is the collective result of years of change and evaluation. The disturbing element is that the experiments with the local government bodies started since the Pakistan period because of political reason and the experiment

¹⁹ Ibid.

is usually reversed with the change of government. Since Independence in 1971, successive governments have tried to use the local government system for their own political interest. Its functioning suffers from some inherent inconsistency and the changing periodically for political expediency. The experiments never serve the purpose of the ruling elites as well as the locals on a long-term basis. The successive governments in Bangladesh have simply twisted the inherited local bodies to suit their political will. The net result is that, local bodies turn it to an unstable, useless, ineffective, futile organization.

UP might contribute significantly to make the country poverty free, grow it as a middle income nation, help to accomplish millennium development goal (MDG) and these growing successes lead us to build a better Bangladesh. Decentralization of administration and power through UP is a top political priority but we see here that the executive branch, legislative and local officials are its primary opponents. Sensitive and important policy like UP needs support of the larger part of administrative and political system. Now it is the necessity of the situation to give off all conflicts and work together for wellbeing of the people as well as the country.

Mohoshin Abbas, a Columnist expressed his feelings regarding ongoing conflicts in this way, “Now the challenge for the government would be balancing the rights between MP and Chairman in the parliamentary constituency. If government failed to do so, the administrative and development system could be a total mess..... Present government has the mandate from the people to do anything for the nation; the government should be attentive on this issue. Strong local government is essential for better democracy”.²⁰

Some analysts think that the resultant conflict between the MPs and the chairmen is now the major obstacle to strengthening the local government system. Each side fears that interferences from the other side might debar them from fulfilling their commitments. This is admittedly the sway of the argument about Upazila Parishad.

In these circumstances Md. Anwarul Kabir appealed,

“As a conscious citizen of the country, I would like to draw the attention of the honourable Prime Minister in this respect..... as the leader of the house, she would ask the Parliament to review newly adopted UP Act 2009 in light of people’s expectation and make necessary amendments with a view to making the law democratic one. Otherwise this will open a black chapter for the government”.

²⁰ Strong Local Government for Better Democracy, Feature Article by Mohoshin Abbas, January, 2009.

The sooner we understand the truth, the better we will practice democracy. The Bangladesh Upazila Chairmen's Forum convener, Muhibur Rahman said, "There was a kind of smear campaign against upazila chairmen so that the local government system could be proved ineffectual and could ultimately be abolished".²¹

Without a long term vision and a consistent government policy the attempts to restructure and strengthen the local government system is bound to end in failure. Besides, it is hope that the ongoing struggle of Upazila Chairman for empowering local governments will be able to bring about significant change in the structure. Even if they will have a partial success, there will be some achievement in favour of local body emancipation.

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