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Protection to local government system

Speakers for amending constitution

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD, Aug 1: Speakers at a conference on Thursday called for legislation to amend the constitution to give protection to local government system.

They said allocation of development funds to members of national and provincial assemblies should be stopped so that they can concentrate on legislation.

The National Conference on Local Government's legislation was organised by AAWAZ Voice and Accountability Programme on Thursday.

At the moment some politicians are creating hurdles in the way of Local Government System because they want to use development funds.

Member National Assembly and leader of PML-N Daniyal Aziz said that separation of judiciary from executive at local level is a constitutional requirement for rule of law.

Mr Aziz condemned bureaucratic involvement in the local bodies legislation.

"Article 140-A of constitution ensures that powers once devolved cannot be reversed so formation of 17 ministries after 18th amendments was violation of rules," he said.

Deputy Convener and Parliamentary Leader of MQM Dr Farooq Sattar said that local government was the engine of economic growth. He maintained that the local government could play an effective role in countering terrorism with the help of police.

"Chief Minister or any other personality should not have power to dissolve local government. Recovery of property tax and motor vehicle tax should be handed over to local government," he said.

Adviser to PTI chairman and former state minister for interior Dr Shahzad Waseem said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bill regarding Local Government guarantees devolution of powers from bottom to top.

He said that the village councils were the basic building block of system that empowered politically, administratively and financially. He also shared a new dimension of 'Nano Blocks' which would be established in urban centres.

"Women and minorities are given increased representation in the bill and problem of masses will be resolved through that system," he said.

He said local bodies system in capital territory was dysfunctional and CDA and ICT were running the city.

He said that residents of Islamabad should be given right to choose their representatives at local level.

Human Rights Activists Tahira Abdullah said local government was not the third tier of the government but the first tier of the government. She said that local government would help him get rid of feudal and tribal system.

She also said that this mode of governance eliminate illegal jirgas and panchayats.

She said that women must be elected through direct elections. She also said that all development funds to parliamentarians shall be ceased right now, as the development activities of health, construction of roads, setting of schools are the responsibility of the local government.

Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation, Naeem Mirza said there should be a minimum of 33 per cent proportion of representation for women, 10 percent for labour and 5 percent for non-Muslims

Talking about the Punjab Local Government Act, he said that one bad thing about the Act is that it considers the province in a sharp rural-urban divide. There should be no rural-urban divide in the application of local governments and union council.

Earlier, Feroza Zahra from Aurat Foundation presented a citizens charter of demand suggesting minimum 33 per cent representation for women, 10 per cent for peasants and 5 per cent for minorities at all tiers of local government, filled through party based and constituency based direct election in joint electorate.

She demanded that union council to be comprised of at least 20 members to ensure meaningful participation of citizens, along with constitutional protection, fiscal and administrative autonomy and an end to rural-urban divide.

AAWAZ consortium partners include Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Aurat Foundation (AF), South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-Pk) and Sungi Development Foundation.