

'Postponement of local government polls move to empower bureaucracy'

*** SAP-PK executive director says public inclusion in local bodies will be distorted**

*** Expert says Punjab has most reservations on LG system and other provinces followed suit**

By Ali Usman

LAHORE: The postponement of local bodies election by the government amounts to empowering the bureaucracy over the elected representatives of the people and the legislatures should only formulate legislation and the developmental works should be left to the local government (LG) representatives, experts and civil society representatives said.

The government announced its decision to postpone the LG elections on Wednesday. Experts said the postponement of the elections was unconstitutional adding that if the circumstances were not favourable for the election the current LG could be given a year's extension. They apprehended that the government could have a plan to wrap the entire system and the postponement could only be a move in this regard.

South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK), which had been working on the LG system, is anxious over the decision and demanded the government to reverse it. It said the election should be conducted in areas where law and order was under control while in other areas it could be postponed.

Public inclusion: SAP-PK Executive Director Mohammad Tahseen said if the system was handed over to bureaucracy then the concept of public inclusion in local bodies would be distorted. He said a large number of women got direct representation in the LG system and 40,000 union councils as their 33 percent representation was mandatory. He said women labourers and minorities were

also given a representation through this system and the development work that had begun through this system would stop by the postponement of the elections.

Former president Pervez Musharraf introduced the LG system in 2001 through the Local Government Ordinance (LGO). At that time the government hired four foreign consultants who picked up various things from the LG system of different countries and constituted the system.

Biggest reservation: Strengthening Participatory Organisation (SPO) Regional Manager Salman Abid, who had been studying the system and authored a book on it, said according to the constitution new local bodies election should have been held in August. He said Punjab had the biggest reservation on the system and the rest of the provinces had followed its discourse. He said the infrastructure had developed a lot under this system. "There might have been corruption in the development work, but record development has taken place after this system was introduced," he said. Abid said the current government had raised issues on the corruption of the district nazims but had not held any of the accused responsible. He said the system should be amended for improvement but it should not be wrapped up.

Zakir Shaheem, who conducted a research titled LG system 2001- An Overview of Four Years Performance, believed that record development work had been made under the LG system. He said everybody in the country wanted to have funds for development works while the job of the legislators was to formulate legislation and not construction. He said legislatures had a problem with funds being given to the local bodies representatives for development and thus considered it against their 'authority'. He suggested that if the non-party election of the local government were made party-based elections, a lot of problems could be removed. He said it was a colonial thought to rule the people through bureaucracy. He said the system should be kept intact and not wrapped up.