

'A unique example of accountability in local govt'

AKBAR HOSSAIN, back from Mymensingh

Formation of standing committees at 146 Union Parishads (UPs) in 12 upazilas under Mymensingh district has set a unique example of establishing accountability in the local government.

Breaking the supremacy of UP chairmen, the standing committees have been able to create a sense of accountability among other UP members, resulting in proper utilisation of the allocated funds.

In order to establish accountability and transparency in the UPs, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with the DemocracyWatch, a non-government organisation, took the initiative to form the committees in Mymensingh.

Four standing committees on education, health, agriculture and financial management have been formed at each union to ensure development through establishing transparency and accountability.

Abdul Halim Talukder, chairman of Bangladesh National Union Parishad, Mymensingh district unit, said the UP chairmen and members must be provided with training so that they can play a more effective role in ensuring development in the area.

Stressing the importance of the standing committees, he said these committees can play a vital role in increasing enrolment of students and providing healthcare facilities.

"If we (UP representatives) find out any irregularities in educational and other institutions in our areas, we cannot take any action as we have no administrative power," Talukder said.

Echoing Talukder's view, Sarafuddin Ahmed, chairman of Dawgaon UP under Muktagachha upazilla, demanded that the UP representatives be given an administrative power.

He also alleged that the policy-makers are paying more attention to urban areas instead of rural development.

After the formation of the standing committees, Ahmed said, they spent the money allocated to them on the basis of consensus among all the members of the committee.

Although the local government bodies, particularly the UP, are supposed to be the closest friends of the people in rural areas, the people and even the UP members don't know whether Tk 20,000 allocated for each UP a year is being used properly.

In the absence of standing commit-



PHOTO: STAR
A union parishad member speaks at the standing committee meeting at Sadar Upazila in Mymensingh.

tees under the UPs, the chairmen enjoy all the right to use the money allocated for the UPs. Most chairmen and members even don't know anything about the UP standing committee.

According to the existing rules, 13 standing committees on different arenas must be formed under a UP. A member of the UP will head each committee comprised of a total of seven members.

During a visit to the project area recently, Gene V George, USAID mission director in Bangladesh, said the formation of standing committees would make the local government more accountable to the people and the service delivery system effective and efficient.

"If the government is really interested in the local government, it should give the UP representatives some administrative power so that they could take actions against irregularities," George said.

Regarding the budgetary allocation for the UPs, he said, "Without building proper accounting system in the UPs, mere increase of allocation would not be helpful. Rather, the money might be wasted."

He also said the UPs that are performing well and using their allocated money properly should be given more allocation.

The USAID mission director also underscored the importance of educational qualification of UP representatives.

"There are some representatives who have not enough academic qualification but they are performing well and there are many representatives who have education but performance is not up to the mark," George said, adding that there should be a combination of education and dynamism among the UP representatives.