

Swabhiman to cover Corporation areas

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BANGALORE, Aug. 2.

Swabhiman, the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA)-Citizens' Interactive Participative Forum for looking into and solving the civic problems in BDA layouts, would be extended to areas coming under the Bangalore City Corporation (BCC).

The BDA Chairman, Dr. A. Ravindra, who is also the Administrator of the BCC, said Swabhiman would be shortly extended to Corporation areas as it had met with enthusiastic response in the three of the 20 BDA layouts where it had been launched.

Dr. Ravindra said another reason for extending Swabhiman to BCC areas was because it was found that many of the grievances faced by the public in the Corporation areas were similar to the ones faced by residents of BDA layouts.

Besides, a majority of the complaints received by the BDA as well as the BCC pertained to the inadequate or lack of civic amenities in localities and the apathy of the officials in dealing with them. Other complaints dealt with corruption and malpractices and the inaccessibility of certain officials.

The idea behind Swabhiman was to involve people in the planning and development of the City and also making the BDA and other civic agencies more responsive to the needs of the people.

Swabhiman took root when Dr. Ravindra attended a meeting organised by the Karnataka Forum for Consumer Action. A majority of the participants at the meeting took the BDA to task for its failure to maintain civic works.

Launched in Bangalore on July 10 by the Chief Minister, Mr. H. D. Deve Gowda, Swabhiman was intended as a forum to involve people in civic matters. Consultative Committees were set up under Swabhiman and it comprised representatives of residential organisations, voluntary organisations and BDA officials.

Conceived as a means of decentralising BDA activities in different localities, consultative committees had already been set up in the three BDA layouts of Hennur-Banaswadi layout, Old Banaswadi Road-Old Madras Road and BTM layout. The committees are dealing with matters such as road repair, drainage, street lighting, garbage disposal, tree planting and other issues affecting the localities. The committees' activities are expected to be taken up in coordination with the Public Affairs Centre of Bangalore.

The Committees were expected to function as a watchdog and prevent unauthorised encroachment of civic land, vacant BDA or Corporation land. Dr. Ravindra said Swabhiman could ensure greater transparency in the functioning of officials.

However, people were divided in their opinion on Swabhiman. Mr. Ramamurthy, a resident of HRB layout, was not happy over the constitution of Swabhiman. Why should the citizens take responsibility for the work of officials, he asked? Sudha, a housewife of the same locality, wondered what was need of having civic officials and paying them huge salaries if they could not discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Munir, a shopkeeper of BTM layout, expressed fears that the committees would become defunct once Dr. Ravindra was transferred from BDA. Pointing out that BTM layout lacked basic civic

amenities, he said despite several representations the BDA had not bothered to get the Banerghatta Road properly repaired. When pressure from residents of the area could not move the BDA to take up the work, what could Swabhiman do, he questioned.

Malathi, an old woman living in HRB layout, was all praise for Swabhiman which she said had partly succeeded in solving the water scarcity in her area. She said HRB layout was not getting piped water supply from BWSSB for several reasons. Now, water was being supplied through tankers. Besides, the BDA on the advice of the local consultative committee had written to the BWSSB regarding the water supply issue.

Raghavendra Rao, an engineer of HRB layout, felt that the Consultative Committees could be made more effective if representatives of other civic agencies such as BWSSB, KEB, KHB, Bangalore Telecom, Police and Slum Clearance Board, were involved.

Meera, a housewife of J. P. Nagar, said there was no need for such committees if the officials discharged their duties honestly. Instead of such citizens Consultative Committees, she suggested a body or organisation to keep watch on the officers. When the BDA or the BCC which had powers could not solve the grievances of the people, what could the committees do, she asked?

Another resident, Radha, said if adequate water, power and proper drainage and sanitation facilities were ensured there would not be any room for complaints. She said the civic agencies or concepts such as Swabhiman could be made to work only if corrupt and dishonest officials were punished.