

Open Government, Tajik-Style

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People in the southern province of Khatlon are demanding that the barriers between them and their local leaders be torn down – quite literally.

As reporter Jamoliddin Saifiddinov discovered, the high fences that surround the provincial government's offices in Qurghonteppa and district government in other parts of the region are seen as symbolising the remoteness of officials.

“The railings around local government buildings instil fear,” said Mahmadohlik Toshev of the opposition Islamic Rebirth Party. “Anyone walking past them will sense that.”

Mirzodavlat Saburov, head of the Panj district authority, says the fence round his office dates from Soviet times, and it does not stop people coming to see him all the time.

But many residents of Khatlon are unsettled by the fact that many of the fences were put up only very recently.

The chief prosecutor for the province, Abdurahim Rahimov, turned the issue on its head and suggested that the barriers would come down as soon as members of the public learned to behave better.

“The fences were put up in the interests of security he said. “Plus, there are trees planted around the prosecution service building [in Qurghonteppa]. If there wasn't a fence people would tramp all over the lawns. It's there to protect the vegetation.”

The local government chief in Rumi district, Habibullo Sadulleev, he is taking the lead by having the fence around his office removed.

Residents of Khatlon who want to visit local government institutions say they increasingly face another formidable obstacle – doormen who question them in detail about who they are going to see and what they want.

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