

A system flawed by design

A look at the administrative structure of the Dhaka city corporations, and lessons from Kolkata

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Ever since Dhaka got the status of municipal corporation from pourashava in late '70s, the city saw incredible growth and rapid development.

As time went by, the city's population increased dramatically as the municipal area expanded, and responsibilities of the city authorities multiplied.

Then in 1990, it became Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). But the core purpose -- to provide better city services to the inhabitants of Dhaka -- could hardly be served.

The government in 2011 split the DCC into two -- north and south -- for enhancing the powers and spheres of city corporations and improving civic amenities.

Despite all these efforts, quality services remain elusive, as city dwellers continue to suffer from perennial problems such as traffic jam and waterlogging. Latest on the list is the outbreak of mosquito-borne diseases, dengue and chikungunya.

In fact, Dhaka has been one of the 10 worst liveable cities in the Economist Intelligence Unit's index for several years now.

But what factors stand in the way of the city authorities' success? Is it overpopulation? Resource constraints? Or is it something else?

If we look at Kolkata, it has improved leaps and bounds in terms of delivering civic services, since the Kolkata Municipality Corporation started its journey under Calcutta Municipal Corporation Act, 1984.

At the time, Kolkata (or Calcutta, as it was known back then) happened to be a city where garbage was dumped anywhere on the streets. Load shedding and power outages were frequent, traffic condition was horrendous and its air used to reek of garbage, according to those who lived and visited the city in the 1980s.

But now, one would be hard-pressed to find garbage on the roads -- that remain illuminated with adequate street lights after the evening. Most streets are free of potholes, and today's Kolkata is no longer the city of traffic jams it used to be.

So what makes the West Bengal capital different from Dhaka?

Experts point out that the city



Photos of Shapla Chattar -- the heart of the capital's business district in Motijheel -- from late 1980s (left) and in recent times (right) give a glimpse of how the city has grown and developed in the last three decades. However, services for citizens have failed to keep up with the urbanisation and development, despite Dhaka going from a pourashava to municipality in the 1970s, city corporation in 1990 and then two city corporations in 2011.

PHOTO: COLLECTED / STAR FILE



corporations in Dhaka have little to do when it comes to governance, and the confusion over jurisdictions of utility service providers are a major obstacle to their success.

The city is in fact managed by about four dozen government agencies -- aside from the mayoral offices -- which were set up under different acts and now belong to various ministries.

The city corporations have no control over Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) and the authorities that supply power and gas. City dwellers often suffer because of the failure of the agencies to deliver in line with their expectations. Also, a lack of coordination among them leaves the city's development and maintenance in a mess.

But both urban local government bodies -- DSCC and DNCC -- are powerless to do anything towards that end. Mayors have in the past expressed frustration over inadequate jurisdiction to better serve city dwellers.

For instance, the city corporation authorities cannot make a master plan or take any drastic measures to address the waterlogging problem, because at least seven other agencies, including Wasa, are tasked with maintaining the drainage.

Yet, whenever the city goes under water, it is the mayors who take the

heat of public criticism.

"It's a faulty governance system for which the city people are suffering," said Tofail Ahmed, a local government expert.

He observed that there are a number of service-providing organisations, but none of them takes responsibility for failure to serve people.

Apart from the lack of coordination, the mayor holds all the executive powers in the existing system, and councillors do not have any specific functions and jurisdiction, he added.



PHOTO COURTESY: ANANDABAZAR

Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, has also seen mercurial development over the last three decades, but their city governance has been much more efficient, thanks to a functioning metropolitan government system.

THE EXAMPLE OF KOLKATA

On the other hand, Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) has emerged as a truly autonomous body that is directly responsible to the electorate.

It performs both obligatory and discretionary functions.

The obligatory functions include providing civic services like water supply, sewerage and drainage, solid waste management, town planning and land use control, and construction and maintenance of streets.

The discretionary functions include

establishment of primary schools, setting up theatres and cinemas for public entertainment, and hospitals, dispensaries and clinics for healthcare.

To provide adequate services for its people, Kolkata adapted the model of cabinet form of city government styled "mayor-in-council", in which the mayor is the head of the city government.

A councillor who commands the support of the majority of councillors is elected mayor. The mayor appoints and leads a council, called mayor-in-council. Each member holds portfolios of various functional departments and is responsible to the corporation for their functions.

"Except some activities, the corporation has the sole authority to undertake any project to serve its citizens," Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharyya, former mayor of KMC, told The Daily Star.

"KMC is a fully independent and autonomous body. It is not dependent on others. That's why the corporation is serving its citizens well."

The mayor and councillors are accountable in different tiers, which ensure better services, said Bikash -- who was the mayor of KMC from 2005 to 2010.

Subrata Mookherjee, another former mayor of KMC, said development activities in his city has gained huge pace soon after it became a municipal corporation.

Subrata also said they follow the

Quader's condition stable: doctors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The condition of Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader is stable now, Abu Naser, deputy principal information officer at the ministry, told The Daily Star citing doctors.

The minister was admitted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) yesterday morning with respiratory problems.

"His [Quader] condition is stable now and his blood pressure is normal," said Abu Naser, adding, "He is now at the hospital's CCU and doctors have asked him to take rest."

Quader, also the general secretary of Awami League, was taken to BSMMU around 10:30am yesterday after he suffered cold-related respiratory problems, he said. He was supposed to join a meeting at AL's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

As the news spread, many of his party colleagues went there.

Citing Prof Ali Ahsan and Dr Abu Nasir Rizvi, physicians at the hospital, Abu Naser said doctors have completed his check-up and all the test reports are good.

On March 3 last year, Quader was admitted to the BSMMU after suffering breathing complications. Tests revealed three blockages in his coronary artery and later he was flown to Singapore for better treatment on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's directive.

After taking treatment in Singapore, he joined office on May 19 last year.

An explosion heard by none

One held after case filed over crude bomb blast, but locals say otherwise

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

When a cocktail bomb explodes, it does so with a loud bang, often louder than a transformer bursting. When multiple bombs detonate one by one, the explosion can be distinctly identified.

Two such bombs allegedly exploded one after another around 10pm on January 29 on North Ibrahimpur school road in Kafrul, during an Awami League rally. Shafiqul Islam Babul, organising secretary of Kafrul thana AL, promptly filed a case accusing 65 men from the local BNP unit, of plotting and executing the bomb explosion.

Here's the catch; even though it took place in the middle of a busy Dhaka street, nobody else except for local AL men seemed to know a bomb explosion took place.

According to the case's first information report (FIR), two bombs were detonated in a loud explosion, and the noise caused panic and unrest among the participants of a rally. A witness listed on the FIR named Md Salahuddin also reiterated that the bomb explosion made a loud noise.

"We had held a rally of 300 to 400 people, when suddenly multiple bombs were thrown targeting us. The noise was extremely loud, and in the situation, we could not see who had detonated the bomb," he said.

Such a loud noise, surely the general public must have known or seen something?

Yesterday afternoon, The Daily Star went to the spot where the explosion supposedly happened, but failed to find any witnesses.

It is a road with shops on either side -- a tailor shop, a couple of general stores, an internet café that burns the midnight oil -- but nobody seemed to know what explosion we were talking about. For most of them, the fact that a crude bomb explosion allegedly took place, was news.

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