

Tale of two cities: Dhaka and London

MURAD QURESHI

LONDON and Dhaka are linked in many ways: historically, socially, and increasingly, culturally. Historically, we are linked through almost 200 years rule by the British Raj and its legacy in Bengal; socially, by the 200,000 strong members of the Bangladeshi community living in London; and culturally, through events like the much anticipated Bangladesh cricket team's first test series in the UK this month, with the historical first test at Lords.

It is not surprising to see that the two cities have a friendship agreement between the metropolitan authorities which run them: the Greater London Authority (GLA) and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

As the first Bangladeshi (also first Asian and first Muslim) elected to the London Assembly last June, and a regular traveler between the cities for many decades since liberation in 1971, I will endeavour to foster such links in the two areas of policy I have focused on since entering into politics -- transport and environmental issues.

While the two cities are in quite

different stages of development -- London in its post-industrial phase calling on the migrants of the world to join our city's prosperity; Dhaka going through the early stages of industrialisation while attracting migrants from the villages -- the problems faced by both cities are not that dissimilar, e.g. major traffic

by expanding its city boundaries. Recently Uttara was included as part of Dhaka, much like Zigatola after liberation and no doubt Savar will in the future.

It appears to me that all the international development efforts in the villages are not bearing fruit if we still have so many prepared to move

old route master double-decker buses, which we are taking out of service in London, but are probably still road worthy for another 10 years. These buses would be much better and safer than many of the ones I have seen on the roads of Dhaka.

But friendships should also be

concentrate my efforts on the cultural front.

Hopefully by the beginning of next year, we will be able to celebrate our annual Boishaki Mela in Trafalgar Square, much like all the other new year celebrations we have. This celebration of the diversity of Londoners will no doubt involve exchanges of artists. We will hopefully also celebrate the 300 odd languages spoken in London by having the Unesco International Mother Language Day on February 21 much like the Ekushey celebrations I saw on my last trip to Dhaka.

And, finally, proudly failing the infamous "Tebbit cricket test," when Bangladesh plays its first test at Lords, most British Bangladeshis will no doubt uphold the British tradition of supporting the underdog, but will probably support England in the big series of the summer, the Ashes series against the Aussies.

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Murad Qureshi is a London-wide London Assembly Member. This is the first of a unique quarterly column from the first Bangladeshi member of the London Assembly. He will offer us his personal Londoni view on all matters between the UK and Bangladesh.

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congestion in the central areas and the need to improve the quality of their citizens' local environment such as air quality, albeit in different ways and emphasis.

In London we are planning for the growth of the city by at least 800,000 persons before 2016, predominately by accommodating them within old areas which need regenerating. In contrast, Dhaka will continue to see increasingly more migration from rural areas to its city boundaries. Unlike London, Dhaka will incorporate its greater popula-

and live in the city, quite often in appalling surroundings. For want of a better metaphor, I will call this the "hole in the middle" development, whereby Dhaka lies in the middle and people in the rural areas vote with their feet by moving to the cities, yet it is not the recipient of any major aid or development programmes.

I am not sure how this was come about, but if the friendship agreement can begin to plug this hole, then maybe it will be worth it. I can think of immediately donating our

based on honesty, and one truth was apparent to me on my last trip. The citizens of Dhaka need to value their local environment a lot more than seems apparent at the moment. There is too much street rubbish in residential areas and a lack of sewage and basic sanitation in many parts of the city.

These problems need tackling soon before the point of no-return, and you certainly don't need to repeat the lessons from London on this front where the smell got so bad from the Thames that parliament

impact adversely on our climate and further contribute to the potential disastrous effect of world climate change on friendship cities like Dhaka. But while we attempt to limit our contribution to climate change in London, it does not help if citizens of Dhaka do not value their own local environments as well.

While I am in the London Assembly, I will contribute if I can be of any help through my continuing annual visits through Dhaka, if only to keep in touch with relations and friends. My first priority will be to

Why today's economists should look to 1964

FARID BAKHT

IN 1964, in undivided Pakistan, the then dictator of West and East Pakistan, General Ayub Khan began a dialogue with the leading economists of the eastern wing. History tells us that East Pakistan became an independent nation seven years later. But that was all far away and unthinkable at the time.

Ayub Khan had grabbed power in 1958 at the height of the Cold War. Needless to say he made Pakistan one of the most loyal allies of the USA and was in supreme confidence. A sparkling new capital, Islamabad, was created in the middle of nowhere.

The export dollars from East Pakistani jute were ploughed into industries in the western wing. East Bengal or Pakistan was relegated to the status of a farm. A hinterland with useful cash-crop farmers and grain producers. The traditional link of East Bengal's rural economy to the centre of India's industry in West Bengal had been broken in 1947 with the departure of the British.

Now, the plan was for West Pakistan to become industrialised and

take the place of West Bengal. The economic relationship or exploitation was shifted a thousand miles to the west. Things were stirring in Dhaka, or Dacca, as it was then known. The Language Movement had not died down from the massacre of 1952. The middle class Bengali saw there was a glass ceiling to advancement in the

unscarred by its failures in the 1970s. Most third world countries still had hopes of a prosperous future.

It was against this background that Ayub Khan decided that he needed the cooperation of Bengali economists in his strategic thinking. He wanted to meet the leading economists on an

resources to invest in East Pakistan. The same would go for the West.

The logic was simple. But it wasn't too simple. The implication was devastating to the existing political set-up. No longer could resources be siphoned out from the East to feed the West. If each wing were economically auton-

later. This had been a massive breakthrough in consciousness in the mid 1960s. It could have then led Bengali nationalist economists to produce a coherent economic plan and vision. Politicians would then have known what kind of society and economy was in store for them. The leadership would have been ready, not just for an auton-

ment had not been made aware of what needed to be done. Moreover, it was preoccupied with the (then) seemingly impossible task of liberation. Economics could wait.

Of course, it couldn't. After liberation, some economists did tell the new leaders in clear and graphic terms about radical economic changes needed, but by then the politicians were not prepared to listen.

More than forty years later, the number of people living below the poverty line today is equal to the entire population in 1971. Kind words from donor agencies about "successful indicators" cannot mask the failure to provide the very basics in literacy, health, jobs, and security to the people. The propaganda won't wash anymore. Now there is no visible over-arching enemy to aim for. There is no external exploiter to justifiably blame our troubles on. The problem lies within our borders.

Farid Bakht is the founder of Futurebangla Network, an independent think tank.

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professions and business. The intellectuals had cottoned on to the economic injustice in this neo-colonialist structure. They wanted a better deal.

Bengali economists therefore were at the vanguard of this thinking by default. It was their specialisation. They were supposed to understand how this all worked. In those days, lawyers monopolised politics. They didn't have strong links to business or finance. Development planning was in vogue all round the world, even in western Europe. Economics was still

individual basis, influence a handful of them, and use them as spokesmen for the current economic policy. He met an unusual wall of resistance from the then "East Pakistani Economic Association" who would meet as one or not at all. Divide and rule did not work. Reluctantly, Ayub Khan went ahead and met them. The economists united on one point: each wing of the country would develop its economy on the basis of the resources present within each province or wing. In other words, East Pakistan would use it

mous, then there would be an inevitable move to political autonomy. Looser links would then weaken the overall political entity and could even lead to "secession." The economists were therefore indirectly talking politics. Geo-politics.

An attempt was made to move the debate to less contentious issues, but the economists refused to discuss any other matters until this vital issue was resolved.

This success in nationalist terms then turned into failure several years

omous province, but an independent country or state.

We now know that across the board the leaders of the new nation of Bangladesh were unprepared to lead 75 million people to prosperity. The debate had remained confined to the politics of identity and language. Slogans about self-reliance were not backed by concrete plans on how this would be implemented. The major sectors such as agriculture and land, water, education, health and industrialisation were untouched. The move-

Terrorising the terrorists

A very important aspect of law enforcement is the level of punishment inflicted on the criminals. As the law requires, punishment must match the crime. Any lenient view of crimes will further aggravate the current alarming law and order situation in Bangladesh.

ABDUL QUADER

THE law and order situation in Bangladesh has deteriorated in recent years mainly due to political patronisation of crimes and corruption by the police. The most talked about subject when it comes to criminal activities is "terrorism." I strongly believe that the present administrative arrangements are not adequate to deal with the colossal tasks of reducing the incidence of different criminal activities, improving the law and order situation, and eliminating terrorism in the country.

While measures such as the Rapid Action Battalion have made some progress in reducing crimes to some extent, we still see killing, rapes, armed robberies, kidnapping, extortion, etc on a day-to-day basis. Rab is basically a bureaucratic initiative without involvement of people, which has come under controversy over extra-judicial killing (cross-fire deaths) and violation of human rights. A number of reforms in the police administration, inter alia, need to be undertaken to effectively address the issue of improving public security in Bangladesh.

A Police-Citizen Committee at each Thana/Upzilla (both municipal and non-municipal) could be established. This committee should consist of members of the police force and other government officials (OC, other police officers, Upazilla Nirbahi Officer) and representatives of major political parties and other distinguished citizens such as the principals and headmasters of educational institutions, women's representatives, etc. It could be a 15-20 member committee. The inclusion of major political parties will create a balance in the committee that would help remove mutual distrust and apprehension about the objectives of such a committee. The committee should:

- λ be independent and neutral in the sense that it will deal with crimes regardless of any party or group affiliations;
- λ meet every month to review the overall law and order situation in the thana/upazilla and local municipal areas, and recommend appropriate measures to deal with any

particular problems;

- λ involve the local community to seek cooperation and assistance in reducing the incidence of crimes and bringing criminals to justice; and
- λ encourage people to lodge complaints of police corruption and political patronisation of crimes, if any, with the committee without fear or favour. This may see a reduction in patronisation of crimes by law enforcement agencies.

Similarly, there should be police-citizen committees at other levels of police administration such as SP, DIG, and IGP (national level). This means we also need Zilla Police-Citizen Committee, Divisional Police-Citizen Committee and National Police-Citizen Committee. The National Committee could be broader in its mandate and be constituted as the main advisory body to advise the government (Home Ministry) on law enforcement and public security in the country. This National Committee could provide feedback to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Home Affairs on aspects of law enforcement and public security.

The operation of the committee system suggested above will, I believe, assist in curbing the police corruption and other excesses as well as political patronisation of crimes and terrorism. This will also restore the confidence of the police in working independently without political pressure or influence, and people will come forward to cooperate with the police in improving the overall law and order situation in the country.

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If we fail to "terrorise" the terrorists by harsh punishment, we will not be able to eliminate terrorism from the society. Any palliative will not solve the problem for sure.

Abdul Quader writes from Canberra, Australia.