

A blunder

Splitting DCC into two

THE inexplicably hurried move to split the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) into two parts is ostensibly to provide better services to the city dwellers. But the popular impression is that it has been done to reap political gain.

The move, therefore, is already suspect on political grounds and what lies in store is anybody's guess. In essence, it has been entirely an unnecessary and uncalled-for step. Actually, if the motivation was to provide services, then decentralisation of the DCC should have been the ideal way forward, and not its bifurcation.

The important point to stress is that decentralisation and bifurcation are not the one and the same thing. For effective decentralisation, we have to have a uniform structure and not one divided into two entities. In the case of other mega-cities of the world, the city administrations are operationally decentralised, but under a unified command.

If the argument is that the over-populous Dhaka city demands cutting of the DCC into two for efficient service delivery, then by the same token, most mega-cities of the world should have more than one mayor.

Speaking of service delivery again, what is most needed is effective coordination between utility services like water, electricity, gas and so on, which are better ensured under the unified command of a mayor.

So, far from being a solution, the move will only add to problems generating confusion all around in matters of service delivery.

Apart from the thoughtless move, what we find extremely unacceptable is the manner in which it has come about. The citizens were not even told of what was coming, no effort was made to inform them of the government's rationale, if any, to carry forward this thoroughly indefensible project.

Quite frankly, the way the decision was taken has baffled us. It is an undemocratic imposition on the people. It will create new bureaucracies, new vested interests, spawn corruption and conflictual situation in the city's management.

Is this change real or cosmetic?

Contradictions in the act need to be allayed

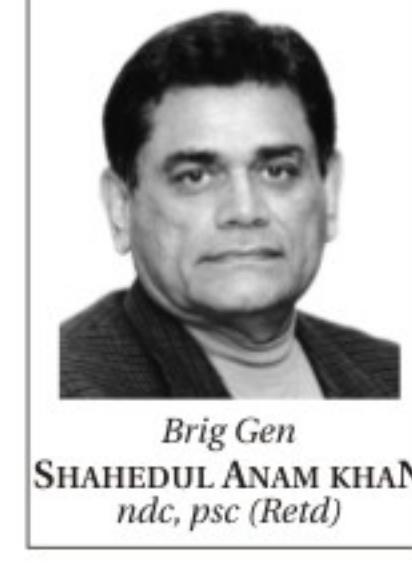
THE passing of the bill vesting executive powers of the upazila parishads in the chairman instead of the parishad itself is apparently in line with the long-standing demand to strengthen local government bodies. The bill authorizes the chairperson to prepare the annual performance report for the parishad officials while upgrading the latter from secretary to principal executive officer. This will give the executive officer the power to implement the parishad's decisions and maintain financial discipline. Undoubtedly the bill has given a more meaningful function for the chairmen who have often expressed their frustration at being mere figureheads of bodies that are vital for spearheading real development especially in the rural areas. But the fact remains that the bills have retained the power of the MPs to be advisers to the parishads of their constituencies effectively allowing them to interfere in the functions of these bodies if they so choose.

The bill therefore can only be regarded with a pinch of skepticism as how empowered the chairmen will be in running the parishads will depend on how independently they are allowed to work. The new functions of the upgraded principle executive officers as well as the advisory powers of the MPs should in no way undermine the decisions and responsibilities of the chairman. This is a prerequisite to local government strengthening as declared by the country's constitution and promised by the ruling party's manifesto.

This is not to say that the chairman of each upazila parishad will not be accountable for his or her actions and the bill has enough provisions for that. The government can take strong actions against poor performing or errant chairpersons including removal from the position.

Thus there are enough buffers to make sure the chairpersons do not misuse their power. What there is a dearth of are guarantees to allow them to work with the autonomy required to promote the economic and social development of their parishads. Whether the unsavoury title of being mere 'puppets' will be eliminated or whether the new bill will bring about an unprecedented

Pakistan: Between the devil and the deep sea



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ON November 25, less than 24 hours after the Nato commander in Afghanistan met Gen. Kayani in Islamabad to discuss matters related to the Pak-Afghan border, troops at a Pakistani border check post at Salala became targets of Nato fire that killed twenty-four of them. This was by far the deadliest incident of its kind, although not the first. A similar strike in September 2010 took the lives of two soldiers and another in June 2008 killed 11.

The incident couldn't have happened at a worse phase, both in the so called GOWT in Afghanistan and in the state of US-Pakistan bilateral relationship. Pakistan has reacted predictably. Strategically significant is its decision to close the Nato supply route to Afghanistan and ask the US to vacate the Shamsi Airbase Baluchistan used by the US as a base for drone attacks on militants in FATA. And Pakistan has expressed its intention to bring under review the entire gamut of Pak-US relationship.

Relationship between the two had had been going from bad to worse for quite sometime. The level of mistrust of Pakistan in the US mind had shot up particularly with the increasing perception about Pakistan's tendency to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. And Pakistan has done very little to remove the impression about its double game-play in Afghanistan. The blame-game on the other hand is seen by some observers as an attempt to shift the responsibility for the US failure in Afghanistan on Pakistan.

In the backdrop of the US plans of phased withdrawal from Afghanistan the latest incident assumes more significance than merely being a "mistake" for which a "detailed investigation" has been launched.

American apology accompanied by the usual excuse of firing in self-defence has been dismissed by Pakistan.

The real question is not whether the relationship will be derailed but what will be the extent of the setback and the consequent impact of it on not only the future of Pak-US ties but also on the strategic equation in the region and the global war on terror. Some have even gone so far as to ask whether this is a

the distinct possibility that the "U.S. will face even less prospect that Pakistan will really crackdown on insurgent groups in the border area." The sense of outrage in Pakistan is much too deep for the government to allow it to die down. And given that the GWOT has no public support in Pakistan, anything that looks as compromise risks not only the future of the government but may well ignite a



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prelude to an US intervention in Pakistan.

Perhaps there are basically three options open to Pakistan and each of them in its own way bears heavily on how things turn out in the future.

Firstly, Pakistan can choose to go along with the process of inquiry that Nato/ISAF have promised with the hope that, as one analyst suggests, the crisis will get "papered over," but with

serious upheaval in the country that is likely to be exploited by the religious extremists. That is a situation that neither the people of Pakistan nor the US would like to see happen. Therefore, for the Pakistan government, "just to grin and bear it" as suggested by some, is just not an option.

The second option is to reassess the pattern of relationship with the US, as has been repeatedly stated by the

Pakistani prime minister. The situation in Afghanistan is in a very critical state and the US is fully aware of the imperative of Pakistan's role in stabilising the situation. By the same token it cannot be lost on Pakistan that it is Afghanistan that makes it relevant to the US and that twice in three decades the developments in Afghanistan had brought the two countries together as strategic partners. The first being the erstwhile Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan starting in December 1979, and the second being the Coalition invasion of the same country under the banner of "Operation Enduring Freedom" starting October 2001.

Pakistan is still suffering the consequence of the first foreign intervention in Afghanistan and is grappling with the problem of how to emerge unscathed from the second. Therefore, what will be the character of their ties after reassessment is a matter of conjecture. But no Pakistani policy maker can either overlook history or Pakistan's strategic compulsions in composing its strategic narrative.

The third possible option is de-linking from GWOT. Given the deep dependence of the US on Pakistan's support in pursuing its campaign in Afghanistan this option has ominous consequences for Pakistan. US' need for unhindered supply through Pakistan, although there are other alternatives, and for operational intelligence and admin support, may force the US to take any step to ensure Pakistan's cooperation, at least till it withdraws completely from Afghanistan. What might be the form of that persuasion is left to the readers' imagination.

The Pak-US conundrum has come to such a pass that it is perhaps time for Pakistan to choose between the devil and the deep sea. One wonders which is the better of the two.

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The tragicomic destiny of Dhaka

ADNAN MORSHED

IS a city only about providing services to its people? What about the city as an historic entity that forms a continuous narrative across hundreds of years? The mechanistic argument that Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has been unable to provide adequate services to the people because the city has become too large is actually a farcical denial of the ground reality of the Corporation, a crawling institution long plagued by poor governance, incompetence, lack of resources and, alas, leadership.

Instead of splitting Dhaka into two cities, the government should have invested in legislating urbanisation policies to stop the megalomaniacal growth of the city. Under the aegis of one governing body, a city should be cohesive -- not only in the urban services it provides, but also in the management of its urban character, natural resources, and future growth.

The destiny of Dhaka was decided "in one of the shortest sittings of the parliament." The speed with which the City Corporation Amendment Bill 2011 was passed at the Parliament, without any debate whatsoever, reveals four things: arrogance on the part of the government; a lackluster opposition party with little interest in fulfilling its parliamentary obligations; increasing political isolation of the government; and, broadly, the state of our democracy defined by a wailing and ignored civil society.

What are the long-term consequences of slicing Dhaka? Imagine this scenario with two Dhaka City Corporations: The two elected mayors of North and South Dhaka are from the incumbent government and the opposition party, respectively. One is empowered with all of the development resources, while the other languishes with too few administrative tools to be effective. One audaciously flexes political and financial muscles, while the other whines about not having any power. The electoral politics that will steer this asymmetric arrangement will most likely create a schizophrenic city, politically, economically, socially, and

urbanistically. The historic character of Dhaka -- *puran* Dhaka and Dhaka -- will degenerate into a permanently fragile and divisive urban system.

Even if both of the mayors are affiliated with the same political party, the likely scenario would be that the city's management and growth strategies would be driven by two different, if not antagonistic, visions. We already know that the lack of coordination among the 40-plus city agencies that provide civic amenities in Dhaka has been a nagging problem in the city's governance. With two City Corporations and the differing bureaucratic cultures that they would foster, the lack of coordination could only deteriorate further.

The Dhaka metropolitan area has 92 wards. DCC North will get wards 1-55, while DCC South will comprise 56-92. Under this arrangement,

Uttara, Gulshan, Badda, Mohakhali, East Rampura, Tejgaon, Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Pallabi, and Kafra are in the North, while Dhanmondi, Ramna, Motijheel, Sabujbagh, Demra, Khilgaon, Sutrapur, Kotwali, and Lalbagh are in the South. A

government spokesperson explained what prompted this sudden slicing of the capital: "It has not been possible for only one City Corporation to provide the desired services to 1.2 crore people."

In other words, one mayor is just too

inadequate to govern a megalopolis like Dhaka. With two mayors, efficiency in administration will multiply.

Administrative fragmentation of Dhaka runs counter to the common urban policies of good cities. A good city is not just about providing services. As history shows, great metropolises often materialise through the holistic vision of a dynamic and empowered urban administrator. A livable city that provides efficient urban services, quality

educational institutions and hospitals, affordable housing, a healthy environment, and adequate recreational areas is less about dividing or sharing governance responsibilities and more about developing a comprehensive urban strategy and then implementing it.

Such a comprehensive strategy is most likely to come from the vision, passion, and skills of one administrator. Consider Enrique Penalosa, mayor of Bogota, Colombia, who, in the late 1990s, masterminded the city's transformation from a crime-ridden city into a livable, mass-transit-based metropolis. And, of course, there was Jaime Lerner, the legendary mayor of the southern Brazilian city of Curitiba, who, in the late

1980s, implemented a host of urban reforms that made Curitiba a shining example of sustainable urbanism.

Great ideas hardly come from

having more government organisations.

Consider this innovation by Lerner. Municipal waste removal trucks could not

enter the narrow, crooked streets of Curitiba's poorer sections. Hence, kitchen wastes would pile up on the street, compromising public health.

Lerner introduced a programme in which residents of these impoverished areas would trade trash bags for bus passes. As a result, slums got cleaner,

and the bus rapid-transit system served more people, making it cost effective.

Mumbai and New York City are no less complex and daunting than Dhaka is. Or, think about Tokyo, Beijing, Sao Paulo, Delhi, London, and Istanbul. All of these giant cities have one administrator, the mayor who is empowered through due electoral process to sit at the apex of a governance pyramid and spearhead a holistic model of urban management and

planned growth. The mayor is given all the tools and manpower to mobilise an efficient administrative machine.

New York City represents a good prototype of urban governance and is considered one of most sustainable cities in the world. But it has only one Michael Bloomberg to keep it that way. Kanwar Sain runs the show in Delhi, which recently inaugurated a world-class underground train system. Beijing, with its stupendous ambition to be a global city, is governed by one mayor, Guo Jinlong.

Instead of creating two City Corporations that are likely to exacerbate Bangladesh's political divisiveness, the government should invest in empowering and enlarging the administrative capacity of the mayoral office. Provide the mayor with more tools and manpower and bring Rajuk under the jurisdiction of the City Corporation. Reform the electoral process to attract the best and most capable candidates with an urban vision and a knack for innovation.

The defeatist argument that Dhaka has become too big to manage will yield flawed urbanisation policies for Bangladesh, a country projected to become an urban majority by 2030. The government must develop strategies to stop the monstrous growth of the city in all directions, devouring floodplains, rivers, and agricultural lands. The country's constitution even mandates the provision of a legal boundary for the capital.

Bangladesh is a land-scarce country. Every square inch of its landmass must be valued. In a country where urbanisation is inevitable, like in other developing countries of the world, instituting flawed urban policies would be a roadblock to the country's economic, social, and political progress. The sooner the culture of proposing knee-jerk policies with short-term goals is replaced with a habit of seeing the larger picture, the better it would be for the country. Reverse the decision to split Dhaka.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

December 1

1965

The Border Security Force is formed in India as a special force to guard the borders.

1971

The Indian Army recaptures part of Kashmir occupied forcibly by Pakistan.

1988

Benazir Bhutto is appointed Prime Minister of Pakistan.

2009

The Treaty of Lisbon, which amends the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, which together comprise the constitutional basis of European Union, comes into effect.