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Local governance falls prey to whims of national political regime

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Speakers tell a roundtable



The local governance of Dhaka city fell prey to the whims of national political regime as rival political parties are considering it as the central nerve of power politics, experts said Thursday.

Interference of the central government at all levels of urban governance not only disempowered the city corporation, but also contributed to its widespread mismanagement and shabby utility services, they said while addressing a roundtable.

The roundtable titled 'Politics of Urban Local Governance: A Case of Dhaka City,' was organised by Brac University's Institute of Governance Studies at Brac Centre in the city.

The speakers, however, stressed the need for operational autonomy of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and suggested implementing the idea of 'city government' floated by former city mayor Hanif.

The Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009 is a major deterrent towards the autonomy of the corporation as it helped the government to tighten its grip on it, which was manifested in the government's move to split DCC, they observed.

Speaking at the discussion, Hossain Zillur Rahman said democratising local governance runs counter to the philosophy of existing politics.

"The system of checks and balances is absent in our political culture even though it's vital to ensure effective and efficient government service," the executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) said.

All of our leaders aspire to become administrators, which is a legacy of British colonial rule, as they view things from a power-centric angle; but they have to rise above and beyond the tendency of exerting power, Zillur said, adding this concept of power concentration on a singular hand has left deep impression into our culture.

"The remark of our mayor 'hand us over all power' carries the same message of power centralisation, I don't believe it would be the best thing to do," he said.

Zillur, however, emphasised on the issues of urban land management, transportation and rampant crime as key challenges to make the mega city more sustainable and livable.

Dr Tuhin Malik, a mayoral candidate for DCC South, participating in the discussion termed DCC as "rehabilitation centre of political destitute."

He said political parties encourage their destitute, who are their party men but not given important positions, to get involved with DCC tender process and illegal construction and many other forms of criminal activities to compensate for political loss.

"If you ask contractors roaming around DCC about their profession, you will see many of them would reply that they are politicians by profession," he said.

Columnist Abul Moksud vented his frustration saying Dhaka, which is now branded as worst livable city across the world, would suffer the similar fate as 'Mohenjo-daro,' now an archeological site but once had been the land of great civilization, if the current situation persists.

“Some big movements could have sparked when Dhaka had been sliced into two pieces to serve narrow political interests, but it did not happen. We have seen enough that national politics makes inroad into the local governments and they gradually became so similar that we can’t differentiate between them,” he said.

DU professor Dr Ataur Rahman, writer Haidar Akbar Khan Rono, DU public administration department Prof Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, executive director of Brac University IGS Sultan Hafeez Rahman, among others, spoke on the occasion.