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Who gains from the proposed trifurcation of Bengaluru Municipal Corporation?

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If the Karnataka government has its way, the 198-strong Bengaluru Municipal Corporation Council could soon be trifurcated into separate municipal bodies, each having about 70 corporators. This change is likely to alter the politics of local-self government in India's IT hub. File photo: The BBMP in session. [The Hindu](#)

*The results of the recent elections to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) are indicative of a vote against the programmes and policies of the Indian National Congress (INC) government in the State, and do not mean that the people have endorsed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which won lower number of seats than it did in 2010. A larger issue, however, as **S. Rajendran** points out, is the uncertainty facing local self-government in India's IT hub, with political parties differing on whether the city should be trifurcated or not.*

The election to the council of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP, Greater Bangalore Municipal Corporation), which was held on August 22, 2015, resulted in Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) retaining a majority in the 198-member civic body, winning 100 seats, followed by Indian National Congress (INC), the ruling party in the State, securing 75 seats. However, it is not yet clear if the BJP would head the civic body as efforts are on for a Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) tie-up to get to the seat of power in the BBMP.

The larger question is whether the popular support extended to the BJP, as made out by the election results, would augur well for the overall development of Bengaluru, which has emerged as a major Information Technology hub over the past decade, accounting for more than 35 per cent of India's software exports ¹. Given the past performance of the BJP which governed the city for five years between 2010 and 2015, and with the INC ruling the State, the expectations of the people may be belied, more so, with the municipal corporation starved of funds.

Yet another issue is whether the newly elected councillors will be able to serve their full term, as a proposal by the Karnataka Government to trifurcate the BBMP gains legislative momentum. A legislation introduced by the INC Government earlier this year to trifurcate the BBMP's jurisdiction specifies that the council will cease to exist. The Bill ² was ratified by the State Legislative Assembly and forwarded to the Governor for his assent who, in turn, has sent it to the President.

The BJP, which won a majority of the seats in the BBMP council, would obviously like to ensure that the trifurcation is put on hold, at least until the end of the five-year term of the present council. Should the President give his assent to the trifurcation, the two houses of the Karnataka Legislature still have the option to decide whether the newly elected councillors will shift to the new corporations based on the municipal wards they represent or if fresh elections should be held. It will be an exercise bearing a semblance to the formation of the State of Chhattisgarh (with a 90-member legislative assembly) which was carved out of Madhya Pradesh.

In other words, there is a possibility that the BBMP council could be dissolved as was done a few months ago primarily to put the elections on hold ³. However, the ruling INC, whose rating is perceived to be at a low, may neither dissolve the newly elected municipal council nor call fresh elections, given the fact that such a decision will go against the verdict of the people. The trifurcation of the existing municipal corporation, which could have nearly 70 wards in each new corporation, may also benefit the INC as it is likely to obtain a majority in at least one of them. This would mean loosening the hold of the BJP in the undivided council, and thereby increasing the possibility of creating governing space for the INC in some of the trifurcated local bodies. That the BJP has done well in the wards in Bengaluru south, compared with the party's performance in the northern and eastern parts of the city, is a pointer to a new political configuration if the efforts to trifurcate the BBMP were to succeed. There are a total of 27 legislative assembly constituencies in the jurisdiction of the BBMP and 13 of them are presently with the Congress and an equal number with the BJP.

The argument for trifurcation

The State Government has argued that the need to trifurcate the jurisdiction of the BBMP arises from the fact that Bengaluru requires effective governance and administration as a result of its growing population. The Statement of Objects and Reason of the Bill states:

"The population of the Larger urban area of the city of Bangalore has gone beyond eighty lakhs. Therefore, it is difficult to supervise the implementation of the State and Central Schemes. For the purpose of smooth administration of the corporation of the city of Bangalore, the expert committee appointed by the Government has

also recommended in its interim report for trifurcation of the corporation of the city of Bangalore. Therefore, it is considered necessary to reconstitute the corporation of the city of Bangalore into two or more corporations.”



The high-level committee constituted by the Government, which was headed by, B.S. Patil, a former Chief Secretary to the Government of Karnataka, opined in favour of the trifurcation and recently that the term of the expert committee was extended by six months to suggest ways and means of implementing its final report, which was submitted to the Government about two months ago. The BBMP is financially fragile, with widespread allegations of financial irregularities and mounting debt. The Comptroller and Auditor General has rightly pointed out the several deficiencies that need urgent correction ⁴. In recent months, as has been made out in cases registered with enforcement authorities, huge sums of money were paid to contractors on mere submission of fraudulent bills although on the ground the civil works concerned were not executed.

The INC government's move in Karnataka to trifurcate the administrative jurisdiction of the State's capital is in stark contrast to the efforts by the BJP in New Delhi to re-merge the three municipal corporations in the nation's capital. The trifurcation of the erstwhile Municipal Corporation of Delhi about three years ago by the INC is stated to have left two of the three civic bodies in tatters leading to a re-merger proposal which is on the cards for about a year ⁵. The matter is presently pending before the Union Ministry of Urban Development.

The politics behind civic government

Interestingly, the city's erstwhile civic body was dissolved in November 2006, in the name of ensuring effective administration of the State's capital and to merge the city municipal councils adjoining Bengaluru, although the primary motive was to postpone the elections to the city's municipal body, which were due at that point of time.

The coalition government led by H.D. Kumaraswamy, of the Janata Dal (Secular), which is now seen as a possible player in government formation at the BBMP, issued a notification in January 2007, constituting the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike and merged the 100 municipal wards of the erstwhile BMP with seven city municipal councils and a town municipal council. Overnight, the jurisdiction of the Bengaluru municipal corporation shot up from around 350 sq. km. to nearly 800 sq. km.

Thereafter, the BJP government of B.S. Yeddyurappa brought forth an amendment to the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act by virtue of which the number of wards in BBMP were raised to 198. The first election to the newly constituted BBMP was held in April 2010, which the BJP won comfortably. And, in the recently concluded election to the civic body, the BJP has won 100 seats, which accords it the status the largest party in the council.

Anti-Congress, rather than pro-BJP

It should be noted that if the results of the recently held elections to the BBMP are viewed as a referendum and that the outcome is interpreted as a vote against the programmes and policies of the INC government in the State headed by Siddaramaiah, the results do not mean that the people have expressed themselves in favour of the BJP. The Chief Minister had personally campaigned in some of the municipal corporation wards while a large number of the Congress activists were on the streets in electioneering for the party candidates.

The whimsical manner in which the INC government in Karnataka ignored the infrastructure requirements of Bengaluru, including garbage disposal, and merely indulged in a political blame game obviously prompted the people to prefer the BJP in the elections. The difference in the vote share between the BJP and the Congress was, however, only one percentage point and this enabled the BJP obtain 25 more seats.

The Congress Government bungled while finalising the reservation for the wards — to dethrone well entrenched BJP councillors, the wards concerned were earmarked for women and this enabled the BJP to shift such councillors to the neighbouring wards, or where they were popular, or, in the alternative, field the wife of such a councillor. Unlike in the last election (2010) when 33 per cent of the seats were reserved for women, in the present instance 50 per cent of the seats were set apart for women.

Left with no choice, the people voted for the BJP although a large share of the electorate was aware of the commissions and omissions of a major section of the municipal councillors of the party. They have been identified as those who neglected developmental works in preference to promoting their vested interests over the past five years. The councillors were by and large busy in repeatedly reconstructing drains and footpaths even as the roads in their jurisdiction were riddled with potholes. It may be noted, for instance, that about a decade ago, a large part of the Rs 600 crores provided under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) for desilting and repair of stormwater drains had been siphoned off prompting the Union Government to substantially reduce the grants to the municipal corporation. If the same situation continues, the BJP will end up as a big loser in the next Legislative Assembly elections expected in 2018. It should be mentioned here that the appreciation of the BJP leadership over the BBMP results has no bearing on the ground reality. The vote in the BBMP elections was largely against the Congress and not in favour of the BJP.

To ensure effective administration of the State, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah too, for his part, should take corrective and people-friendly actions, more so since it is common knowledge that there are several leaders in the INC who

are waiting in the wings to be the head of the Government in the State. At the present juncture, there is a distinct possibility that they may work overtime to unseat Siddaramaiah and thereafter make a bid to be the Chief Minister. However, this may not be an easy task, given the good equations that Siddaramaiah enjoys with the Congress high command. The present round of elections to the BBMP was the first major test after the Assembly elections and it is obvious that Siddaramaiah has failed to deliver at the local body polls. It is perhaps the first time that a ruling party at the State level has failed to obtain a majority in the Bengaluru municipal polls.

The next round of elections in Karnataka will be that of the Karnataka Legislative Council in which 11 members have to be elected from local bodies across the State. This will be followed by elections to the Zilla panchayats and, consequently, in all these elections to be held over the next six months, the Chief Minister has to prove that he is very much in control of the State.

Politics apart, Bengaluru, which is home to nearly a fifth of the State's population, requires an effective administration and it is imperative that the Chief Minister appoints a cabinet rank minister solely in charge of the capital city's affairs. Under the present dispensation, one among the Council of Ministers is merely placed in charge of Bangalore's development in addition to the other departments vested in him.

Talking of better infrastructure and civic amenities for the residents of Bengaluru, merely during elections, will not suffice.

References:

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