

WHY RETAIN IRRATIONAL PROVINCIAL BOUNDARIES ?

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Existing Provincial and District boundaries in the Island are an historical accident and a legacy of British colonial rule. In 1833, when Colebrooke established five provinces, it was a simplistic exercise of demarcation into North, South East, West and Centre. With the passage of time, through modifications other units were added for a final toll of nine Provinces.

These nine Provinces continued as the sub-national unit of administration until Independence and for sometime thereafter. It was in 1955 that this system of Provincial Administration was abolished and District Administration introduced in its place. The Districts are really sub-divisions of the Provinces.

There was never unanimity as regards an appropriate unit for development administration. In fact, the post independence era witnessed experimenting with varying units ranging from the Local Authority, Assistant Government Agents Division, the revenue District and the Province. To achieve popular participation smaller units are advocated. For development planning, larger units are preferred. Divisional Development Committees and Development Councils mooted at various times were considered failures. The establishment of Provincial Councils (with possibilities of merger of adjoining Provinces) is the latest attempt in this regard. However this repre-

sents a reversion to a unit discarded in 1955.

Thus it is seen that varying units are proposed and then discarded. Before giving up in despair, it makes sense to look again at the formulation of sub-national entities.

It is our view that the malady lies in the way the Provincial boundaries are drawn. The boundaries of the five provinces in 1833 did not matter very much as the colonial administration had very limited functions of peace keeping and collection of revenue. With independence and self rule, the requirements have changed. Today, the Government is no longer a passive observer of the development scene but an active participant as well as a catalyst.

Integrated development

A few illustrations may suffice to demonstrate the inadequacy of existing provincial boundaries. The integrated development of the Walawe Basin has been hampered by the fact that at least three Provincial Authorities are involved in the implementation of this single Project. As Map 1 shows the lower reaches in the river flows through Southern Province while at the higher reaches, the left bank falls within the jurisdiction of Uva Province and the right bank within Sabaragamuwa Province. Going back to a Provincial Unit, the administration is further complicated as at least, two of the new capitals are now situated much farther. Integrated development of the Walawe Basin has suffered

due to a multiplicity of administrative authorities.

Pollution control

The strains caused by existing Provincial (as well as District) boundaries are revealed in other instances too. For example, environmental protection is extremely difficult where the development region cuts across a natural river basin, as at Walawe. The Walawe Ganga receives the effluents discharged from the National Paper Corporation factory at Embilipitiya which is situated in the Sabaragamuwa Province. Downstream water is used as a source of supply of drinking water for the towns of Ambalantota and Hambantota situated in the Southern Province. If the entire river basin fell within a single administrative entity, the abatement of the pollution created by the discharge of toxic effluents would necessarily have been dealt with in a more effective manner.

Sharing of water

To illustrate the point how existing Provincial and District boundaries hinder development, let us take the water resources available for agriculture which is the main plank for poverty alleviation in the Dry Zone. The ad-hoc, nearly North-South line demarcating the Eastern Province separates the sources of water from the downstream users. Any "Kanna meeting" serves to highlight how the passions can rise when it comes to decisions for distribution of irrigation water which is the life blood of the Dry Zone farmer. When different ethnic groups inhabit the higher and lower reaches of rivers controlling the respective Provincial Councils, the conflicts are likely be further aggravated.

Rivers that cross national or sub-national boundaries present governments with thorny issues of water sharing. The neighbouring

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TABLE I PROPOSED REGIONS INDICATING INCLUSIVE URBAN AREAS AND RIVER BASINS								
Region	Area Km ²	Selected Urban Centres	River Basin No. Name	Catchment Area Km ²				
I	2670	Colombo	1 Ketani Ganga 2 Bogoda	2292 378	XI	5448	Kandy Matale Nuwara Eliya Badulla	60 Mahaweli Ganga (Upper reaches)
II	2720	Kalutara Ratnapura	3 Kalu Ganga	2720				46 Thamparaken 9 47 Namaksda Aru 11 48 Manipattu Aru 101 49 Pattanthe Dephne Aru 101 50 Veti Aru 28 51 Unnikichai 350 52 Mudeni Aru 1295 53 Mivangola Ela 228
III	3009	Galle Matara	4 Benrota 5 Madu Ganga 6 Madampe 7 Telwatta 8 Rajgama 9 Gin Ganga 10 Koppala 11 Polwatta 12 Nilwala Ganga 13 Sinimodara Oya 14 Krama Oya	829 60 50 52 10 332 63 1236 971 39 226	VI	8167	Trincomalee Mahiyangana	54 Maduru Oya 1559 55 Puliyanpota 63 56 Kinmechi Oya 78 57 Bogoda Aru 185 58 Mandan Aru 13 59 Makaranchi Aru 37 60 Mahaweli Ganga (Lower reaches)
IV	8494	Hambantota Ambalantota Embilpitiya Wailawaya Buttala Moneragala	15 Rekawa Oya 16 Uruwokke Oya 17 Kachigala 18 Walawe Ganga 19 Karagan Oya 20 Malala Oya 21 Embilpitiya Oya 22 Kirindi Oya 23 Bampawa Aru 24 Mahasitawa Oya 25 Butawa Oya 26 Manik Ganga 27 Katupia Aru 28 Kuranda Aru 29 Namasdagas Aru 30 Karamba Aru 31 Kumbukkan Oya 32 Bagura Oya 33 Girkula Oya 34 Holawa Aru 35 Wila Oya	76 352 222 2471 58 404 60 1178 80 13 38 1267 88 132 108 46 1233 93 15 31 489	VII	9529	Anuradhapura Horowapattana Kalawewa	66 Paikutti Aru 21 67 Yan Oya 1538 68 Mae Oya 91 69 Ma Oya 1038 70 Mahaweli Oya 3284 71 Kal Aru 212 72 Madaragama Oya 842 73 Kale Oya 2805
V	5958	Ampara Batticaloa Bibile	36 Heda Oya 37 Karanda Oya 38 Simaha Aru 39 Tandadi Aru 40 Kangikadichi Aru 41 Rufus Kulam 42 Pannel Oya 43 Ambalam Oya 44 Gal Oya 45 Andella Oya 46 Chappi Aru 47 Perangi Aru 48 Nay Aru	611 427 52 22 57 35 186 116 1813 328 67 842 587	VIII	4780	Jaffna Manner Vavuniya Mullaitivu	70 Churien Aru 75 71 Chava Aru 31 72 Palladi Aru 82 73 Mundel Aru 189 74 Kodakkallu Aru 75 75 Per Aru 378 76 Pali Aru 85 77 Manthapilly Aru 41 78 Thorani Aru 88 79 Piramanthal Aru 83 80 Nethai Aru 122
IX	5479	Puttalam Kurunegala Chilaw	94 Moongil Aru 95 Mi Oya 96 Madurankull Oya 97 Kalagamawa Oya 98 Rathambala Oya 99 Deduru Oya 100 Karambala Oya 101 Ratmal Oya	44 1533 72 253 217 2647 598 217	IX	5479	Puttalam Kurunegala Chilaw	81 Kanakareyan Aru 808 82 Kalawshappu Aru 57 83 Akkarayan Aru 184 84 Mandakal Aru 300 85 Pallarayan Kadu 180 86 Pali Aru 456 87 Chappi Aru 67 88 Parangi Aru 842 89 Nay Aru 587
X	2263	Negombno Gampaha	102 Maha Oya 103 Aitnanagalu Oya	1528 735	X	2263	Negombno Gampaha	102 Maha Oya 1528 103 Aitnanagalu Oya 735
					XI	5448	Kandy Matale Nuwara Eliya Badulla	60 Mahaweli Ganga (Upper reaches)

Indian sub-continent is replete with instances of wars and strained relations over shared river basins. The division of water resources was at the root of the Hindu-Sikh dispute in the Panjab where the Akali Dal, the political party of the Sikhs, have been agitating for a

greater share of the regions waters. These events finally led to hundreds of deaths when the Indian Army stormed the Golden Temple at Amritsar in 1984. Division of the Indus waters at the upper reaches had been a major bone of contention between India and

Pakistan. Similarly, the construction of the Farakka barrage by India in the upstream Ganges led to a dispute between India and Bangla Desh.

These are lessons of experience for us to avoid potential conflicts

among the users of water. When water is the limiting factor for cultivation in the Dry Zone, the growing population can pose an immense problem for coordinated river use, unless the decision making authority encompasses a whole river basin.

Natural Hazards

Provincial boundaries render it extremely difficult to manage natural hazards. Very often, co-riparian areas belong to different Provinces, where the provision of relief and mitigation measures is hampered by separate administrative authorities. For effective control of floods, the entire river basin in best administered as one unit. Can two different authority namely the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council and the Western Provincial Council, being two independent decision makers effectively grapple with the vexed problem of the perennial flooding of Ratnapura and Kalutara districts? Clearly, the two latter townships should be placed within one decentralized entity.

Transport

Topography and transport network are two other relevant spatial considerations. The existing Provincial boundaries throw up grossly anomalous situations. In a provincial system, the capital of Sabaragamuwa, namely Ratnapura is less centrally situated for inhabitants of Kegalle and Mawanella. In fact both Kegalle and Mawanella may be within speedier commuting

Admittedly, the current Provincial (or its sub-division, the District) entity presents an elusive physical unit that has absolutely no relevance to development.

Optimum spatial unit

What then is the most optimum spatial unit? How can its boundaries be drawn? Should they be economic regions, political regions, natural regions or regions based on ethnicity, religion or lan-

guage? Should they have a minimum physical size, population and a resource base. It would be ideal if all sub-national units are of one uniform size and population. However, in the more densely populated areas of the Island, the delineated units will necessarily be smaller in size relative to those in the sparsely populated areas.

A paramount reason for sharing of governmental power at a sub-national level is the need for active local participation. This entity should be an instrument for coordination of development activities within the region. Thus the subnational devolved unit, whether it be the "District" or the "Province" should provide a bridge between the national and local levels. Can the existing provinces provide a way of aggregating demands and disaggregating national policies and plans. Far from working towards these goals they contribute to sowing the seeds of dissension by potential conflicts in resource sharing.

Watershed approach

Our suggestion to create a physical unit that will remove the impediments to socio-economic distance from Kandy or Colombo rather than from its new capital. Similarly, for residents of Southern Province, Galle may not be the ideal administrative centre. Size and shape of teh North-East Province makes travel most cumbersome within that territory.

development, points to the "watershed" as the best criterion to delineate sub-national territorial entities. A watershed is simply an area of land that drains into a single waterway or body of water. It is the most optimum natural region which permits decision makers to focus on land use, crops,

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