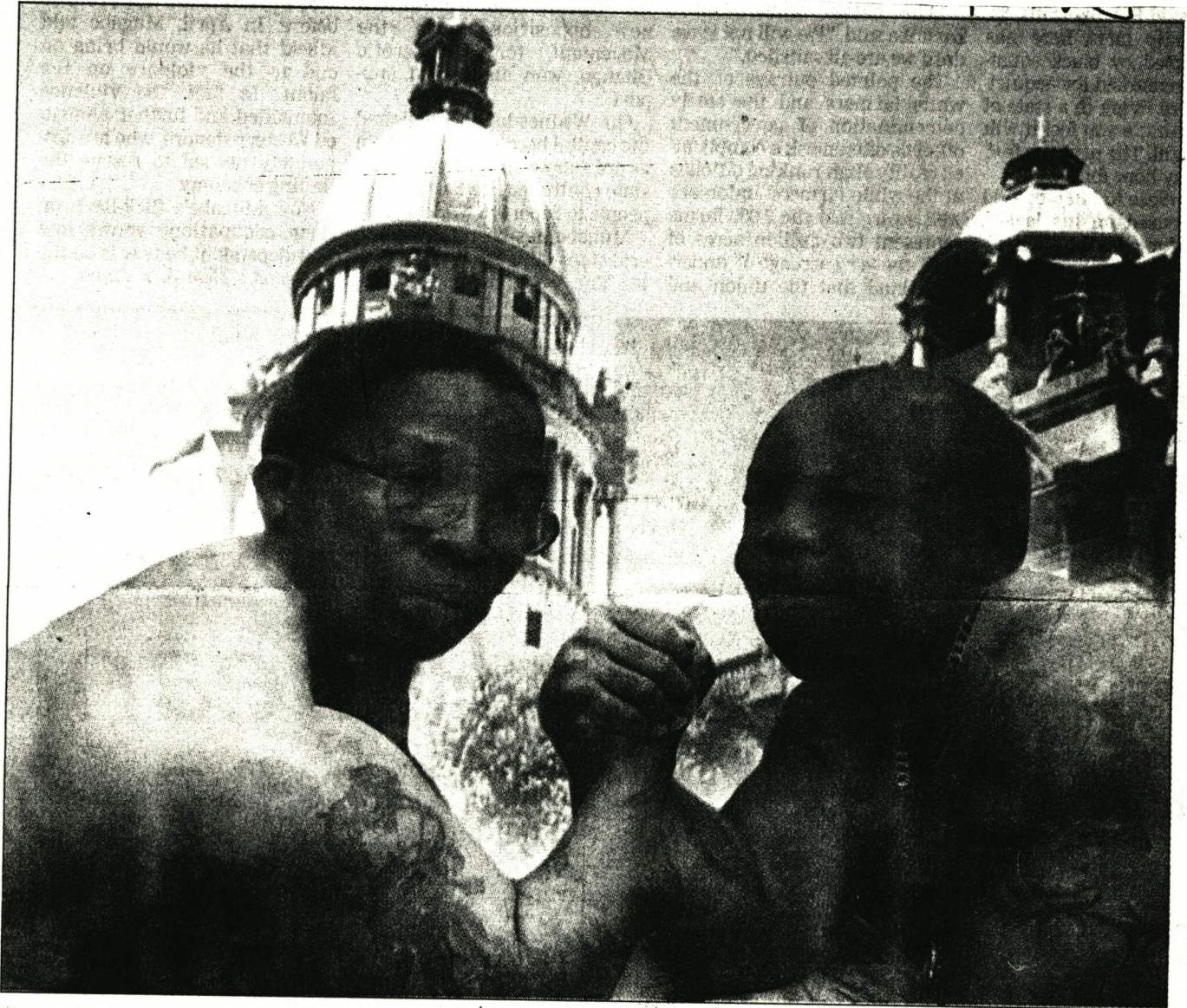


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SUNDAY TRIBUNE PERSPECTIVES AUGUST 6 2000



Powerplay between the ANC and IFP is raising blood pressure in the provincial coalition *Graphic: RODERICK EPHRAIM*

Battling for a bite of the KZN apple

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Something's rotten in the province of KZN, where comedy and cloak and dagger politics threaten the province's uneasy ruling alliance.

Greg Ardé unpacks the grubby battle for urban control after the November's elections

Yusef Bhamjee is a worried man. The African National Congress MPP and chairman of the provincial parliamentary committee on local government was recently lumped with a mess that, if unresolved, could delay the local government elections due in November.

Last week in Ulundi the Inkatha Freedom Party's Nyanga Ngubane, the KZN minister of local government, tried to waive parliamentary rules in an urgent bid to get MPPs to agree to a provincial law determining the shape of municipalities in KZN after elections.

Simplified, the ANC wants a municipal system that will allow the winning party in elections to appoint an executive mayor in big cities like Durban, and this person will appoint a cabinet of cohorts.

This has infuriated the Democratic Party, the IFP and New National Party.

They are vehemently opposed to an executive mayor and will accept only, at a push, a council where the "cabinet" is made up of people from different parties, proportionate to their election support.

Provinces can choose their own type from a variety of municipal structures set by national government, but the Municipal Types Bill in KZN has travelled a curious road through the provincial parliament.

It was released for public comment in February and nobody bothered about it except the KwaDukuza-Stanger town council and the Democratic Party – both offered input on the bill.

It was shelved, despite repeated reminders in Bhamjee's committee, according to an angry Mark Lowe, DP MPP. Five months later, in Ulundi last week, Ngubane wanted the bill rushed through parliament and referred it to Bhamjee's committee.

The committee sat for four days, prompting DP MPP Roger Burrows to say: "This is legislation by exhaustion."

The Ulundi meetings were punctuated by delays as MPPs objected to this or that clause; some called for "comfort breaks"; others went into huddles in the corridors outside, and one indignant MPP even marched off to make a personal protest call to IFP leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi. MPPs "consulted their principals" (bosses) and promised to fly in legal hot-shots to argue constitutional law.

All this because the ANC couldn't get its way – well that's if you believe what the DP, NNP and IFP say.

The issue is particularly prickly because it is another upset for the ANC-IFP coalition which controls KZN.

"This is a marriage of inconvenience," IFP firebrand David Ntombela said in a huff. "Coalition doesn't mean we have to accept everything the ANC says."

Typical bonhomie between MPPs went out of the window at the meeting and the ANC turned on DP MPP Belinda Scott.

Scott started eating an apple during talks, prompting ANC finger-wagging and complaints about the DP's "eating apples arrogantly" – which spurred a defiant Lowe to bite into his own apple.

Bhamjee was pressed repeatedly to put the legislation to the vote and refused, allegedly because ANC MPPs wanted to persuade their "coalition partners" in the IFP to vote with them.

Bhamjee claims the IFP and ANC were deep in provincial and national talks in a bid to iron out their differences, which "will impact on their future and possibly the coalition".

Views on this differ.

IFP MPP Hulumeni Gumede last week declared the issue was taken to national ANC-IFP leadership level because provincial leaders Sbu Ndebele and premier Lionel Mtshali could not agree.

But, IFP MPP John Aulsebrook was adamant this week: "We haven't been negotiating with the ANC because we have a party position. At provincial level that's our position, we can't violate our policies. We're sticking to our policy. That's what people support."

Bhamjee rejects allegations that he tried to stop a vote on the legislation, which the ANC would have lost.

"I had to exhaust the process so people can say they had a fair chance to decide on a system and then be happy to live with that decision."

Regarding the legislation's delay, he said: "It did not reach the committee timeously. One can only assume that the tactics of the IFP in parliament are different from their tactics in cabinet."

Insiders say the IFP took the issue to provincial cabinet, but realising how contentious it was, sent it back to MPPs rather than sour leadership relations, although Ndebele and Mtshali eventually clashed.

Twice the ANC threatened the coalition which governs KZN and which sees Mtshali in the hot seat as premier, courtesy of the ANC's vote. At the end of the day the DP is desperate to know why the ANC is so keen on having an executive mayor, especially because ANC leaders in the Durban metro want the executive committee option.

Speculation abounds: Ndebele wants to be Durban's executive mayor; Ndebele wants to appoint "his man" ANC MPP Felix Dlamini; ANC camps are lobbying for different candidates – including councillor Nomusa Dube and current metro mayor Obed Mlaba; the ANC wants to bring in somebody from outside KZN; and ANC and IFP may carve up the province along the lines of "we'll take Pietermaritzburg, you have Ulundi".

Truth or speculation by hysterical minority parties desperate to cling to what little power they have?

Bhamjee says these parties weren't spitting fire a few months ago in the Unicity steering committee, the body planning a new council structure after elections.

Nevertheless, the entire process is mired in controversy.

Or in the words of Bhamjee, the man who doesn't want to be the patsy for the collapse of the historic ANC and IFP coalition: "I've done everything honourably. There's something rotten in the state of Denmark."

Battling for a bite of the KZN apple

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

THERE are various options for new types of municipalities in South Africa after the November local government elections. National government proposes in the Municipal Structures Act that provinces choose their type from a menu in the Act. KZN's municipal types, ranging from the Durban Metro to a town the size of Kokstad, will be determined by the Municipal Types Bill – the subject of ferocious debate. An executive mayor is one option. In Durban it means the majority party appoints a mayor, who picks 10 councillors for his "cabinet". The mayor and cabinet will have significant powers in running the city. Alternatively, an executive committee is much like the existing Metro system, except that currently political parties are represented there in proportion to the support they won in elections. In the new system, the winning party is not always obliged to include other parties proportionately in this cabinet. In terms of the executive committee option, councils can have sub-councils, much like the existing system.