



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of
the National Academy of Public Administration,
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series: Civil Service
Interview no.: G10

Interviewee: Professor Mohammad Mohabbat Khan

Interviewer: Andrew Schalkwyk

Date of Interview: 20 February 2009

Location: Dhaka
Bangladesh

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www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties

SCHALKWYK: Today is the 20th of February. I'm here with Professor Khan from the University of Dhaka in the Public Administration Department. Can I ask if you've given your consent for the interview before we start?

KHAN: Yes, I have my consent for you to take the interview.

SCHALKWYK: Thank you very much. I wonder if you could just briefly describe your position at the University of Dhaka and your career path.

KHAN: *At the present time I am the senior-most Professor at the University of Dhaka, senior-most in terms that nobody is senior than me as a Professor at the University of Dhaka at the present time because I was appointed to the post of Professor in 1983 at the age of 32. So now I've reached the stage, in fact, from July 1 last year, I became the senior-most Professor at Dhaka University so that alone gives me, of course, honor, as well as certain entitlements like membership to the University Syndicate which is the highest decision-making authority plus a part-time membership of the University Grants Commission, the regulating body that looks after the activities of all public and private universities and an independent house. But I am yet to be given the entitlements.*

In terms of my career, I did my honors in Political Science in 1968 and did my Masters in Public Administration from the University of Dhaka in 1969 and I was in the first batch of public administration students because then that was opened. Then I joined the University of Chittagong, the port city, in April 1970, as soon as my results were published. I got a First Class in Masters. Then after three months I was appointed a Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the University of Dhaka. At that time there was no Department of Public Administration.

So after teaching there for two years, I went to USA (United States of America) on an Asia Foundation scholarship. I went to Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University that was at that time the top-most school in public administration in the USA. Today even that is the case. So I finished my MPA from there by the end of 1973. So Spring '74 I moved to the University of Southern California, the School of Public Administration at that time ranked second nationally among public administration school in USA, to do my Ph.D. In 1976 I finished the requirements for a Ph.D. as well as two Masters again.

So September '76 I came back, rejoined the Department of Public Administration, University of Dhaka as my services were already transferred to the department way back in '72 when I was abroad. I was appointed Assistant Professor in '76 and then '78 I was appointed Associate Professor and then Professor in 1983. I was also Chairman of the Department of Public Administration from 1983 to 1986. I was a Member of Bangladesh Public Service Commission, the constitutional body as you know recruits civil servants from 1999 to 2004. In between I taught at universities in USA. In fact, in University of Southern California I taught when I was a PhD student. Then universities in Jordan and Nigeria and I did my post- doctoral work also at Cornell University as well as University of Texas at Austin.

I was a Ford Foundation Fellow at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore. In the meantime I've written sixteen books. Many of these have been published abroad in the areas of governance, public sector, public sector reform, corruption, local government, rural development, all kinds of areas I write in. Also so far 185 of my articles and chapters in edited books have been published, most

of them from abroad, USA, UK (United Kingdom), India, Singapore, Hong Kong Japan and many other countries.

I have been a consultant to World Bank, Asian Development Bank and USAID (United States Agency for International Development), ILO (International Labour Organization), UNDP (United Nations Development Program). So I have traveled to many countries for conferences, congresses, seminars, symposia, presided over international meetings. In fact, I may be going on sabbatical next year and I am in fact looking for opportunity to do some research abroad, especially USA if that is possible. So that's about it.

SCHALKWYK: *So would you talk a little bit about the civil service in Bangladesh. What are the major challenges facing the civil service at the moment?*

KHAN: *You see the challenges facing civil service in Bangladesh are basically to restore its credibility. In the public mind, the civil service does not have any credibility. There are many reasons for that. It has not really served the people at all well. Secondly, there is corruption in the civil service, inefficiency, ineffectiveness and these are all related to the failure of reform efforts in the civil service. If the civil service could be reformed in the ways it has been suggested by both the government-appointed commissions and committees as well as by donor-funded bodies like World Bank, UNDP, ADB, then I think civil service could have faced the challenges of the 21st century. It is a highly- centralized, elitist, it is a closed shop. It does not allow people to join at different levels. So it is, from my perspective, it is completely out of tune with the reality in Bangladesh.*

The two challenges it faces, as I said already, first it lacks credibility. Second is, of course, it has not been able to grasp the reality of what it needs to do. It is still thirty or forty years behind, the way it works, the structure that it retains, these are all basically relics of the past. If you look at the structure of the civil service it is basically remained from the British time. Even after British rule of 180-190 years, then there was Pakistan rule for another forty-odd years. After that we have passed 37 years with independence. So you can calculate how many years; but nothing much has changed.

There have been simply minor tinkering, a little bit here a little bit there. Disjointed efforts that would not basically make the civil service change its character. Unless you can do that, nothing is going to move much.

SCHALKWYK: *Why has it not been able to reform?*

KHAN: *You see, it is a deliberate attempt. You see, if you read my books I have demonstrated quite clearly, in a convincing manner, that by not reforming, the civil service has been able to retain its control and sort of enable the politicians to depend on them more and more. Thirdly, they could survive and prosper without producing much. Now why reform has not taken place is a related issue.*

Number one, political commitment as demonstrated by action has not been there. All the political parties, top leaders, talk about reform. They have been talking about this ceaselessly from 1972 onwards, since independence. But no one can show any impact of those talks. Even government appointed bodies came up with recommendations that were very radical in nature. This means they were in tune with the reality but these were not implemented. Politicians feel comfortable while they talk about reform, but they feel very comfortable with maintaining the status quo.

Our civil servants are accustomed to do that because the way they're trained they are not basically—they are not trained to be reform-minded. They are basically given very traditional type of training. They are not indoctrinated; they are not pro-reform minded. They are not proactive; they are reactive. As human beings are they are very much scared about change.

The second reason, of course, as I'm saying, the resistance on the part of the civil servants, especially the top ones, at the top of the civil service, especially belonging to the BCS Administration Cadre. They are basically the linear descendents of the CSP, Civil Service Pakistan, who are descendents of British India's premier civil service, the ICS. So it is a continuation of a historical chain.

Thirdly of course, there have not been any reform movements in the way that has been the case in the USA if you remember in the 1880s and all that. So there has not been pressure from outside for change, especially from NGOs or CBOs (Community-Based Organizations), those are components of the civil society in Bangladesh. Civil society has done a lot of good things for Bangladesh in poverty elimination, but in this particular area they have not done anything. They have not been able to organize any movement, there is no focus, there is no locus and, fourthly, though people complain bitterly about civil service inefficiency, corruption, mismanagement, but they have not been able to organize themselves also.

Finally, excepting a few academics, I hasten to say I am one of them; nobody really takes an interest in civil service reform.

SCHALKWYK: What role have donors played in trying to get reforms implemented, international donors?

KHAN: *Unfortunately, I have shown it in that book, this one, Administrative Reform in Bangladesh, they have been very good in taking people like us as consultants, giving us funds. They have been very forthcoming stressing the need to reform, to start initiatives that will lead to reform. But unfortunately, when it came to implementation of such reforms, they were rather unsuccessful, and I think deliberately. Because I told many donor communities representatives, including USAID mission here, World Bank chief, ADB chief, that you know, unless you put tremendous pressure on the government, the government will not implement reforms. So how you could do it, you should tag the reform with your assistance, which they have not done. I don't know why, but this has been my experience.*

The donors have been very good, very forthcoming. Even now, these days, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) is very interested in reform, so are KOICA (Korea International Cooperation Agency) and DFID. But then what they're good at is basically appointing people who can diagnose the problems. But we already know the problems. There are lots of recommendations given by me; there are lots of words on that line. But the question is, they're not playing that role when it comes to implementation of those reforms. Implementation of the reform is the most crucial stage, as you know in the reform cycle, it is the Achilles heel. That means there basically everything stops. You form a committee or a commission, they diagnose. They come up with recommendations but when it comes to implementation, because their vested interests are affected, then of course you find all kinds of hurdles unfortunately.

So I believe donors' roles should have been more proactive. They should have had more dialogue. They should have basically pushed very hard, let me use a

very strong word to do that. Otherwise, it will not be effective at all. Then it is simply and purely a waste of money on the part of donors.

SCHALKWYK: So there has been a number of reform committees formed—.

KHAN: *And commissions.*

SCHALKWYK: The Mueeed Commission, the Nurunnabi Committee—.

KHAN: *Yes, yes, many.*

SCHALKWYK: They've all made recommendations.

KHAN: *Yes.*

SCHALKWYK: What has happened to those recommendations?

KHAN: *Nothing much because only day before yesterday I had a panel discussion with the former Establishment Secretary who is now Rector of the BPATC (Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre) and I asked him, what has happened to the recommendations of Public Administration Reform Commission, PARC, that was supposedly the latest, gave its recommendations in 2000. He said, "Not much." We have changed the forms like from A4 to this, what kind of reform is this? This is a very unfortunate scenario that you see. What happens with reform implementation at the top, I'll give an anecdote.*

I did a consultant's assignment for UNDP in 1989—in fact, sorry, USAID in '89. Then I went on a Fulbright Fellowship to USA. Then I worked one year in Jordan and I came back in '91. UNDP contacted me to ask me to review what happened to that recommendation of USAID study. That is called Public Administration Efficiency Study that is a pioneering work that I headed for six months, it is a five-volume report.

SCHALKWYK: When was that finished?

KHAN: *'89. It started in May '89 and finished in November. So it was a six-month study. Intensive, I took leave from the university; it was a full-time consultancy. So UNDP wanted to know what happened to that. If you read this study, the mechanism that they devised, that each and every step we had to consult the civil servants, top civil servants, show them the findings, the recommendations. Even after that, when I talked to the Additional Secretary, Ministry of Establishment at that time, '91, and it was September '91 I remember, then he was saying, he also happened to be one of the persons with whom we contacted regularly. These recommendations were not accepted for this reason, that reason, all excuses.*

I told him, but you were there, you also approved. We also moderated our tone. Even then you couldn't do it. So main thing is, unless you thoroughly recast the bureaucracy first in terms of personnel, unless you could put in reform-minded bureaucrats at the top, nothing is going to happen. I would still suggest that there should be a permanent reform commission attached to the Prime Minister's office and an academic like me, not by a civil servant, should head it. If you put a civil servant in charge nothing is going to move. Yes, there should be members of the proposed commission. There should be members from the civil service, very senior level, ex-secretaries, top NGOs and private sector. Because in Bangladesh we cannot afford to ignore them, we cannot afford to ignore the

private sector, we cannot afford to ignore the civil society segments. We need to bring them together and we need to continuously interact—first we need to do, if there is a permanent reform commission located in the Prime Minister's office, we need to first assess what has happened to all the reforms, in concrete terms. How many recommendations have been implemented, to what extent?

Number two, then we devise what is called implementation strategies, how this could be done. Whether we go segmented approach, holistic approach, whatever it is, and then thirdly we draw plans and then tell the government that these are the action plans you need to follow. Otherwise there is no chance; no way you can do it. Anything else?

SCHALKWYK: I would like to know a little about the relationship between politicians and senior civil servants.

KHAN: *It's very cozy.*

SCHALKWYK: Some people have said that the civil servants don't want to do reform.

KHAN: *They don't.*

SCHALKWYK: That they stop reforms from happening. Others have said that the politicians have no interest in doing reforms.

KHAN: *None.*

SCHALKWYK: Themselves. So what happens to any of the reform processes? Why do politicians not want to do reforms?

KHAN: *You see politicians are not interested because they don't want to change the system; they are very comfortable with it. You have to understand the reality. They are not interested in administration; they don't want to know about it. They're always busy with other things. If they are politicians in the sense that we have now, they're more interested about their constituency, their constituency's interest, broadly. They're not interested in the reform of the civil service. Civil servants take full advantage of the situation. They tell the minister, sir, you need not worry; I'll get my things done. The place, you know, you have to understand, we don't have a person like Mahatir Mohammad of Malaysia here, we don't have a Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. They don't have any vision; none of the leaders have any vision for future. They're talking about digital Bangladesh, I'm sure they don't know what they're talking about frankly speaking.*

Now, you need visionary leaders at the political level who'd be ruthless you know. Unless you have vision, there will be no mission. No vision, no mission, no action. You can quote me on that.

SCHALKWYK: So it seems that all the reform commissions, the Nurunnabi Committee, the PARC, were all run by—.

KHAN: *Bureaucrats.*

SCHALKWYK: And all of them suggested sweeping reforms.

KHAN: *Yes, but you have to remember, when they were doing it they were all retired civil servants. When they were in the civil service they all opposed reforms.*

SCHALKWYK: So how does that work? Why?

KHAN: Then they wanted to give a nice image to the people, that you know, I want reform. Because he knows he will not be affected. You start with 1972; these people opposed Professor Muzaffar Chaudhury's Administrative Reform Committee that came up with very big reforms and all of them. At that time they were may be Deputy Secretaries. The two persons that you mentioned by name, I know both of them. One is Nurunnabi Chowdhury and the other is Shamsul Haque, Chairman of the PARC.

When they were Chairmen of this committee and PARC, they were already retired from civil service. One joined politics and failed to become a Member of Parliament from his area. So he was given a plum posting with the rank and status of a state minister. So he was using that as a big office. I know him and Nurunnabi also retired, he was given a prestigious appointment with a car and all that so he could come to the office, was doing that. Their nature never changed. So don't just start from there, start from the beginning, Administrative Reorganization Committee, about which I talked thoroughly. Because if these recommendations would have been accepted and implemented, there would be tremendous change in the administrative system and ethos of Bangladesh. It would have developed much further and much more, we have not developed, because we do not, you see, the problem is private investment is not coming. The main reason is not political, because of the administrative system that we have. They want to control everything. All their premises are wrong. The government should be limited.

Only for basic, essential services people should go to the government. They don't understand that. So there should be more public-private and third-sector partnership. There should be drastic and thorough reform. I've already included that, you can look at another book which is coming out in June 2009 called From Government to Governance. South Asian Publishers in New Delhi would publish this. I'm sure they have a worldwide network. And for Bangladesh UPL to do it. The subtitle is expanding the horizon of public administration to public management. There I talk about in the Southeast Asian experience, I talk about Bangladesh experience, what has happened in terms—more broadly governance. Why things have gone this way. What role corruption has played? Why mismanagement has cost so much.

But ultimately you have to understand the dynamics of reform. Then there is a book; if you're more interested I can ask you, this book was published from the USA. There I talk about reform resistance in public administration. Look, so if you contact me I will give you the details of that. One book you can look at, it may help you. There is a book published by UPL called Development Dialog: Issues of Bangladesh-III something. Let me bring it to you and show it to you and then I'll give it to you.

SCHALKWYK: We can do it after the interview?

KHAN: Yes, I'll give it to you.

SCHALKWYK: The politicians, after each election seem to produce these, or set up these reform commissions,

KHAN: Yes, they do.

SCHALKWYK: Why is that the case if there is no intention of—?

KHAN: *Just to show that they're reform minded and to accommodate some of their allies in the civil service. Shamsul Haque, in fact, lost election, parliamentary election, from Comilla, his constituency, so Sheikh Hasina wanted to give him something. Nurunnabi Chowdhury was trusted by of Begum Khaleda Zia, who gave him that chairmanship. So this is the kind of a plum office they'll give you for your loyalty and service, not to the country, to her. You have to understand that. When they call and announce a committee because people expect reforms. So they can say yes, I have appointed this committee. But committees have produced reports all right, recommendations all right, but nothing has happened in practice.*

SCHALKWYK: What do you think of the recommendations of the committees that have—?

KHAN: *Most of them, I think are very sound based on facts, figures, very appropriate. This is the reason why they were not implemented.*

SCHALKWYK: So the reports are generally good?

KHAN: *Of course, of course. That's why they are not implemented. They are always interested in small changes here and there. They pick up, what will be the size of paper. Who the hell cares about the size of the paper? These are all very minor, not only minor but redundant recommendations of some of these committees and commissions. So they picked up those, not the substantive ones.*

For example, most of the committees recommended, starting from Muzaffar Choudhury, that you have a unified civil service system. So that promotion is open. So that you can bring in people from outside. None of the governments accepted that recommendation. You will be surprised to know that from 1972 until 1977 or '78 there were two or three major reform efforts and most of the reform committees, commissions recommendations were not even made public. So what do you think? What is the rationale? So you need to understand why things have not changed.

SCHALKWYK: It seems that even recently the public service doesn't even need to resist the reforms because the reforms are never attempted.

KHAN: *Yes. Never attempted because, and the reason is, the civil servants themselves resisted because when reform bodies made recommendations, you have to understand the process. The government sends it to a review committee consisting of all civil servants to study the feasibility of their implementation.*

SCHALKWYK: So this is another committee after the—.

KHAN: *Yes, yes, and they always say that these are not possible for this reason, this will be disrupting, this one is financially burdensome.*

SCHALKWYK: Are those reports publicly available?

KHAN: *No. You'll never know to see them anyway. I saw some of these because I had some connections in the Ministry of Establishment, but you will not be able to see any of them. They will not show you.*

SCHALKWYK: Is there space for—it seems obvious that many of the senior civil servants must realize that there are needed reforms. Is there space for a secretary and a ministry to try and implement reforms himself?

KHAN: *No, I think you are assumption is not correct. They don't realize it. They realize it only after they retire from the civil service so they can become consultants, giving the donors the impression that they were Secretary for so many years. We know the whole thing, the civil service needs changing. I always ask them why didn't you do it when you were in the civil service? Why did you resist change?*

So what you're saying is not correct. They may talk about reform, because when they are nearing retirement or they have only two or three more years service left they talk about yes, civil service should be reformed. They write newspaper columns. I don't want to mention their names but you know they are quite well known. When you go and sit in dialogues, they're all pro- reform. Then who is obstructing reform? I'm not certain because I'm not in the civil service, not even near power. So who is obstructing. If they're not obstructing, the politicians are not obstructing, then who are obstructing reforms, tell me.

SCHALKWYK: So in 2003 a new training plan was formulated. What came of that?

KHAN: *Nothing, the same thing, what is new?*

SCHALKWYK: Who came out with that?

KHAN: *Some officials of the Ministry of the Establishment under the guidance of Dr. Kamal Siddiqui.*

SCHALKWYK: Who produced the training policy?

KHAN: *Dr. Kamal Siddiqui, who was Principal Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, produced the training policy; in fact, it was done under his direction. There were others involved. But then you have to understand that we don't have the right type of training institutions, we do not have the right type of personnel, logistic support. Also the intention is not there. It was said that in all civil servants must be trained before they are, must undergo training before they are promoted. But then you talk to training institute; they say we don't have the capacity. So how can we implement that?*

In some cases your ministry or department will not release you for training. So you're not trained anyway.

SCHALKWYK: Are there any training needs assessments done?

KHAN: *I did it a long time ago in 1998 for Asian Development Bank, I forgot that. We found out that there was a disparate gap between the requirements of the job and the way they were trained. In fact, I studied all the training institutions, both in the public sector; I did the job for the Asian Development Bank.*

SCHALKWYK: What happened with that report?

KHAN: *Nothing.*

SCHALKWYK: Who was it submitted to?

KHAN: *It was submitted, our job was to submit it, both a copy to the Secretary Ministry of Establishment as well as to the resident representative, Asian Development Bank. But then after that I never consulted. I was never asked to do anything. So you can understand what happened.*

SCHALKWYK: I understand a number of salary increases have happened in the last ten or so years, is this true? Within the civil service?

KHAN: *Not much, very minimal. I think they're all wrong in that because I always believe that you must pay civil servants for performance. They should not automatically have pay rise. What they have done there, they made some increase in pay across the board that is of little use. If I'm not performing, I'm also getting pay raise; you're performing, you're also getting. So you have no motivation to perform anyway. It will not do much in terms of efficiency and productivity.*

SCHALKWYK: What, I've come across the public administration sector survey.

KHAN: *By the UNDP.*

SCHALKWYK: That was carried out by the UNDP. When was that done?

KHAN: *It was done in 2003, 2004—no, no, 1993, '94, sorry.*

SCHALKWYK: Was that done in conjunction with the Ministry of Establishment?

KHAN: *Yes. They simply flatly rejected the report.*

SCHALKWYK: What were the conclusions of the report?

KHAN: *The conclusions were there should be changes. If you read my book it's all there. There should be changes in the training, the way they should be recruited. It should be based on merit. All the committees and commissions say the same thing.*

SCHALKWYK: How do you think you could get around this resistance to reform or unwillingness to do reform?

KHAN: *You can get around it but this is very difficult. Number one, as I already told you, you have to first clean the top of the bureaucracy. You have to remove most of the Secretaries of agencies, send them in voluntary retirement, forced retirement not voluntarily. Make some of them OSDs, Office on Special Duty. Then you bring about people at the top through screening who are reform-oriented. If you look at their service record you can find that.*

SCHALKWYK: Who would be willing to do that?

KHAN: *The present government should do it because they are talking about change all big things, what is the manifestation of that, we'd like to see it. Secondly of course there should be a permanent reform commission attached to the Prime Minister's Office headed by an academic practitioner composed of as I already told you. There should be constant government support for that commission so that it undertakes studies and then has the power to implement. Otherwise, you know it is not going to happen anyway.*

SCHALKWYK: Are you familiar with the MATT-2 project?

KHAN: *Of course, I am.*

SCHALKWYK: As I understand it is trying to compel the Ministry of Establishment to introduce some performance management and human resources policies.

KHAN: *But it has not happened.*

SCHALKWYK: By offering them this training.

KHAN: Yes.

SCHALKWYK: How do you think a project like that could work?

KHAN: *It will never work because you see our civil servants are very interested to go abroad for two reasons, First, to save some money and bring home a car and a refrigerator and second, not really to acquire knowledge. Let me be very blunt. I told about DFID chief, that the program not going to work.*

SCHALKWYK: So you don't think that that could compel—?

KHAN: *No, why should it compel? Can it force them out? You cannot. So what they did is they took some junior and mid- level civil servants, took them to certain universities in UK. In the bargain they got also M.A. or M.S. degrees. I know about the program MATT-1, MATT-2 both. There was one MATT-1 initially. But I don't know, maybe I'm more disillusioned than I should be. I have not seen any result. Why should I be enthusiastic, tell me.*

SCHALKWYK: What was the Four Secretaries Committee?

KHAN: *These were four secretaries, all members of the Civil Service of Pakistan members including Dr. Kamal Siddiqui but they did not do much. They came up with a report. It is a general report.*

SCHALKWYK: When was this?

KHAN: *It was '93 I think. They came up with a report and they were funded by DFID. At that time it had a different name. They were given a tour of the UK and on the basis of that they wrote the report, what should be done, time management, this, that. But all this you will get in my book. If you read this book of mine, it is all there. If you just look at them you will find out yourself what were their intentions. It is a good visit.*

SCHALKWYK: So I understand the new Regulatory Reforms Commission has been established along with Better Business Bureau under pressure from the private sector.

KHAN: Yes, private sector and donors.

SCHALKWYK: Do you think the private sector and donors could form a pressure group to compel—?

KHAN: *Yes they could, and I think they should, but the Regulatory Reform Commission has done some work in the sense of simply cutting certain rules and regulations, but to what extent government has accepted those is another question. I know the chairman of that commission very well, I know other members. I know also the Better Business Bureau you're talking about, but it meets very rarely, very rarely, so you can't expect much.*

SCHALKWYK: But do you think it's a start of—greater pressure from different sectors?

KHAN: *Yes, but you have to go in a very much more comprehensive way. This is very much ad-hoc; sort of one step, not joined in, because Regulatory Reform*

Commission is here, then Better Business Bureau is here. But then there is no bridge between the two. There must be a kind of holistic system within which it may work. Okay? Anything else?

SCHALKWYK: Do you have anything else to add?

KHAN: No, no. In fact I have to run.

SCHALKWYK: All right, thank you very much for your interview, I appreciate you giving me your time.