



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.:

G2

Interviewee: Dr. Rizwan Khair

Interviewer: Andrew Schalkwyk

Date of Interview: 19 February 2009

Location: Institute of Governance Studies
Dhaka
Bangladesh

Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA
www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties

SCHALKWYK: Today is the 19th of February, 2009. I am at the IGS (Institute of Governance Studies) offices in Dhaka, Bangladesh, with Mr. Rizwan Khair who is here on secondment from the civil service. Before I start the interview can I ask if you've given your consent for this interview?

KHAIR: Yes.

SCHALKWYK: Excellent. So I'd like to talk to you about efforts at reform in the civil service, in the administrative cadre in the Bangladeshi civil service. But first, can you tell me about what you do now and what jobs you've held that have brought you up to this position.

KHAIR: *Well, I started my career after passing the University working in a private bank. I was working there for four years and I sat for the civil service test and then I entered the civil service. I worked in the field level administration, I belonged to the administration cadre. So I worked on the field level for some time and then moved onto the ministry. I worked in the ERD (Economic Relations Division) in the Ministry of Finance twice. Then after that I also worked in the training academy, so I was beginning to serve as a trainer. I worked also in the training academy which is called the Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC) which basically trains civil servants. I got interested and I moved on there. I worked twice there in my career for a long time, a pretty long time. I think nearly six years there.*

Then from 2006 I got the secondment from the government to work as the Academic Coordinator on the program at the IGS. Now, this program which is called the Masters in Governance and Development. It is basically capacity building of the civil service in Bangladesh. It is an academic program broadly designed to give the concepts and skills of governance and development in the civil service. I look after the program among other things.

Also as the Academic Coordinator of the Centre, I look after the other training programs, lots of projects coming up, giving input here and there. There is a research angle to the institute itself. I don't oversee that, but sometimes go and help out there but its more of the academic activities of the Centre.

SCHALKWYK: Thank you Sir. I'd like to talk about the challenges facing the civil service in Bangladesh and the attempts or efforts to introduce some reforms. So if you could start, could you talk about some of the issues and challenges that are facing the civil service and some of the reasons why reforms have been attempted.

KHAIR: *I think the challenges is enormous in a globalized world where I think the civil service now have to deal with a lot of issues. They have to have different kinds of skills than were needed ten, twenty, thirty years back. If you talk to the older civil servant they will give you one angle, but I think the civil servants of today have to deal with many issues. There is a question of accountability, better governance, transparency which are issues that were not there twenty, twenty-five years or even when I entered the civil service. This is some question I ask my colleagues when I go on a training session, what do you think has changed over the number of years.*

They all come up to, after some time they come up with things have changed, things have moved—that change is inevitable. But I think in a rapidly globalized world, changes are much more than people could conceive twenty years back. If

you look at the public sector globally, the whole public sector management has changed, how the government operates. But unfortunately in the context of Bangladesh, we haven't changed much. We are still based on the colonial model given to us by the British.

Once you enter that structure, to so-called iron framework, your whole mentality changes. You go by processes, you go by rules and regulations. You become unresponsive to the needs of the citizens. Some how or other you come up with the concept that you know everything that is best for the citizens. I venture that you can find this kind of stuff all over the world. But somehow or other, I mean, there have been a lot of efforts, I won't say efforts, I'll say a lot of initiatives have been taken. Okay, from 1972 to 2000 the last reform committee was in 2000, the PARC (Public Administration Reforms Commission). If you look at '72 with the committee for administrative reform, the Administrative Reforms Committee was set up in 1972. Well, if you look at that, there have been a lot of, a plethora of recommendations.

But basically, no major structural and procedural changes have been brought into play. Whatever the changes were there was made mostly cosmetic in the sense that a nip here and a tuck there. It didn't really help to change the mindset of the civil service. If you ask me right now, what's my basic options. If you ask me right now how many of the civil servants are able to cope with the challenges in a globalized world, I won't say even 90%, 95% wouldn't be able to because they're stuck in the old mode. It is very difficult to get them out of that stuff. It is not that some of them don't realize that changes are necessary and they need to come up with better skills for able to make them capable to meet those challenges.

But somehow or other those initiatives are not taken by the government or there is a wider resistance within the bureaucracy. You know all bureaucracies are resistant to changes. You know, in my training sessions with them, I discuss reforms with them, that is one of my classes that they take. When I say to them these are the things that people are doing now, so look at India, look at Malaysia, look at Singapore, look at Pakistan, the neighboring countries, what's happening? What are reflections of global changes. They said, well, that's not India, we're not Pakistan, we're not Singapore. But they don't realize there is a need to change. But the problem is they say that's not our job, who's going to take the decision. Well it's the politicians decision to take the change.

But I think that there is a growing consensus, at least within the junior levels that there is a need to change. But how do we bring about the changes that is problematic. How does change—? I keep telling them there is no need to change radically. Changes are always incremental and it should always be home grown. The problem with all these committees and commissions and that is that people within the bureaucracy are feeling that these are all consultant-based. Then well, there is something that flies in from the outside, they're donor driven. So there is a resistance within the bureaucracy to change and to maintain the status quo. That's always a big problem.

I would say that there is a growing consensus within the civil service, it has not reached critical mass until now. Usually when I teach in a class I show them a diagram of a balloon with an arrow that says there is a consensus growing among the junior civil servants that some sort of change is necessary. They agree with that. But some are rather, if you put in ten years, twenty years of life, you also tend to have sort of a group feeling. If we take that we are going to be affected, that kind of stuff. I think that also boils down to the problem that the rewards and punishment are not performance based. That's very crucial because

rewards and punishments are—when people get promoted on the basis of batch or group or seniority. Okay, the merit is not a question. Skills are not a question. So which ever batch comes first gets promoted. If you find today, in newspapers today, you find out 62 Deputy Secretaries have been promoted to the post of Joint Secretaries. I have doubts how many of them are capable enough to man that post. Well, this group has been—let's promote them. It is that kind of criteria that is quite important.

Another thing is that, and I hear this things about senior, very senior, even can retire if they want to. See, seniority in civil service is based on the concept of you sit for one exam and then your seniority is fixed forever. But you know there are people who pick up skills later on. Okay, people who come there first on the senior list, might not be ready, might not pick up any skills in twenty, twenty-five years of service that he or she puts in. But thanks to one exam, which is also, you can't really justify this thing because that's really not scientific in the sense that, like I keep telling—I have questions about the exam system.

If you are from a pure science background or a mathematical background you tend to score more on the exam because in those kinds of subjects the scoring band is higher. But if you come from social science or economics, the tendency in the public university is that that kind of exam is, well you just get first class marks. The highest you get is 60 which as you know is not even equivalent to something like that, 80 plus. So with a 60 and someone who scores with a math background, that person comes up with an 85. It doesn't really make sense. You can't really just measure two persons on the same plate. So the exam system is faulty.

What could have been done, it was done previously, is that the exam could be part of the seniority. The other part of seniority could have been your performance, your training, all taken together. Then the seniority of one person, they're not senior forever. That seniority is based on the performance. You could do that. There would have been a possibility—you skim people to the top, you get fast track people. But there is no fast track in the civil service in Bangladesh. There are, there have been talks about what you call the Senior Service Pool, there's a lot of discussion how we'll do it, who is going to be there and all that.

SCHALKWYK: What is the Senior Service Pool?

KHAIR: The Senior Service Pool is like the executive service in the United States. In the USA it is called the Senior Executive Service. SES I think. It is supposed to—people are supposed to sit for an exam and get in a sort of pool where you get fast track promoted based on your performance and better, more scaled—. It is supposed to be there but it has not happened over a number of years. It was initiated back in 1979, '78, '79. It was there. The name of it was Senior Management Pool. It was there from '79 to '89, but no exam was held. People entered the pool on the basis of seniority, so you don't have many there.

If you look at the history you will find out that these things are cropping up. So I would say that the—if you asked me one blunt question, is the present generation of civil servants equipped to face challenges twenty years, fifteen years down the line? Are we able to compete with other civil services in the region? I would say no. Because though we have the basic skills these skills have not been upgraded. Okay, skills need, like look at the armed forces. They have continuous grading, skills enhancement which we don't have.

For example in our, I after entering the civil service you have to go to this foundation course. You know what I did there? I did my foundation course, it was nearly two years after I entered the service. By that time the foundation course becomes totally irrelevant. You learn things you already know. Then you don't learn other stuff. So training is—if training is linked up with your career, that makes it. If training is not linked up with your career in management. There is no career planning system in the civil service. They are—the government has opened what is called career planning and training wing in the Ministry of Establishment. They're supposed to give inputs to the government for how to do career planning but actually they don't plan down there. They are helpless with the other wing that is there in the planning Establishment Ministry is APD, Appointment, Planning and Deputation. The APD will decide who will decide who goes where. I mean, people have made, been shouting for ages. People have come back from study abroad straight in a particular period. You oppose them in a particular department where they can utilize the training. There is no match of skills posting. And APD decides what people are needed where, that's it.

CPT, the Career Planning and Training section or the wing should have a far better say over who goes where if they have the right person in the right place. They have absolutely no say there.

SCHALKWYK: So who established the Career Planning Wing?

KHAIR: This was, I think a lot of donors and there was a lot of talk that there should be a career planning wing. CPT was, the government itself did, they decided to have a Career Planning Wing.

SCHALKWYK: So would that have been in the Ministry of Establishment and the Prime Minister would have made that decision?

KHAIR: Yes. The problem is you have to let CPT wing work and give proper inputs of deciding who goes where. Well, what happens when I come back from abroad, the CPT usually puts in the file that I have this training and I should be placed in that department or ministry. But almost 99.99% of the cases their recommendations are not looked into. It is the APD wing that decides who goes where. [interruption]

SCHALKWYK: So why does the APD not take this into account?

KHAIR: Well, it what you call empire building. They are very powerful. At one time Joint Secretary APD was the most powerful Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Establishment. He was the one who decides who goes where. Now decisions are taken higher up.

SCHALKWYK: When was that changed?

KHAIR: The decisions?

SCHALKWYK: The decisions were moved up.

KHAIR: It was by default. Maybe sometimes it is political and sometimes it is also the person who is manning the post. When I joined the service the Joint Secretary APD was the person who was there, now it is more of a political, not all the time, many times it is political. They say you place that person there and there or it is APD's wish to match him where there is an existing vacancy. APD has that

power and CPT has not been able to really exercise its real functions. So that is becoming a problem.

Another question, you asked me whether they are capable, civil service, within the service, existing, they are. But what they need to be placed in the right place is one and two is they have to be, they should be given the opportunity to show their skills. Then thirdly the skills need to be honed up a little bit. There are a lot of junior ones who are pretty good, a lot of mid-level ones that are pretty good. But, unfortunately, they don't get placed in the right places or they don't have the opportunity to show their skills.

The performance evaluation system is quite opaque. You know, in my 21 years of service I really don't know how much I've got in my what is called the ACR. I have a hunch—.

SCHALKWYK: That's the Annual Confidential Report, right?

KHAIR: Yes. Nobody knows who is doing what. [interruption]

SCHALKWYK: So what sort of changes do the junior staff want to see?

KHAIR: *Probably if you ask some of the junior staff, I don't know whether you'll have a chance to talk with them. They would probably want to see a clear-cut career progression. They probably want to see rewards and punishment for performance. Many of them come from the private sector where they were very well paid. Many of them also want some good pay, which would motivate them to say in public sector.*

Now interestingly in the public sector, it offers an opportunity for someone to really have a very interesting, very useful working. If you're interested in doing public service many will say the job is interesting, that's why they do it. I think the power is also a big thing. You do exercise a lot of power in the public sector. So the power is also a thing. But if you ask any junior what they want, they'll probably say a clear cut career progression, incentives for performance. So they don't get frustrated and end up after ten years, fifteen years saying I'm not getting anywhere.

I got an e-mail from someone I trained about ten years back, twelve years back, in the training academy. He sounded very frustrated. He said what should I do. He wants to leave the service. I said, I just told him just hang on for a little bit. I told him that, that's it. But also, you find a lot of resistance within the civil servants. That is resistance for changes to come. But, I think that resistance can be overcome if the political government has a very strong will to make changes. It is sort of a mismatch between the will and the sort of a growing consensus. It is not that we have reached a critical mass where the bureaucracy itself is able to push for changes. We haven't reached that for a lot of different reasons.

Okay, we haven't really reached that. So there is resistance within. But I would say from working within the civil service there is a consensus growing, a growing consensus, I would say that. Some changes are necessary if not radical. I mean, what really needs to happen is a matching of that consensus with the other political will to get things happen. That radical will has been somehow missing. If you look at the reform efforts from 1972 until now, there has been no substantial political will to bring in those changes. That is the reason probably the changes did not come and the bureaucracy, all bureaucracies are resistant to changes

and bureaucracies play their part. I mean if you give a chance to a bureaucracy to say no, they'll say no. That's what happened in the context of Bangladesh.

Another thing is you see people from '72 to 2000, you had this old generation of—I'll give an example which I'm very sure none of my seniors that you interview will agree to, maybe one or two might. I remember meeting this civil servant from India who was working as a consultant to APD a long time back. He told me, "Look, there's one difference, there are a lot of similarities between your civil service, your civil services and ours." I said, "What is that?" "The difference is that," he said, "the Indian civil servants, very senior ones, if they don't like something they'll say, 'we don't like it.' The problem with your senior civil servant is that if they don't like something they'll do everything in their power to see that things don't work out."

My experience also shows that. Things have not really worked because the senior civil servants were not on board all the time. They were not able, or they were not coming to terms at one point in their life they have to let the power go. Interestingly, I don't know, once they come out of the civil service they become big advocates for reform which is something that you'd ask a question. Then what have you guys done so long? When you were in power, why haven't you guys changed? What have you done for us? That's a burning question the juniors ask the seniors, what have you done for your juniors.

They say if you had initiated some changes maybe you wouldn't have benefited but the country and we would have benefited. So why didn't you start initiating the change? You tried to stop every thing that has come that way. Well?

SCHALKWYK: Why have they?

KHAIR: Why have they? Well, they come from an old school of bureaucracy that believe—. I don't know, power is probably one. Power is not probably, power is the prime concern here. Basically they thought that they knew better of how the country operated. Interestingly many of them will find that they become pushers for change within the civil service. Then there is a counter-cushion within the civil service now, what have these old buggers done when they were in power.

SCHALKWYK: Where would the reforms have come from that have been attempted?

KHAIR: Well, from '72 it was a political initiatives, nothing happened to it interestingly. The big ones have been all government in power initiated, but the problem is.

SCHALKWYK: The political government.

KHAIR: Yes, but the problem is, when you go to implementation changes, it became just another book on the shelf. Interestingly, if you do a content analysis, things that have been said in 1972, 1973, and things that have been said in 2000, you'll see repetition of stuff. It is mainly a repackaging of reforms with some new ideas coming in. But the general idea has been there, the reforms must be initiated, they should be performance oriented. They should be scored for high flyers to be picked up and trained and put in to appropriate positions. They should be, what should I say, compensated appropriately. That kind of stuff has been there. If you look at these, these are all the reforms proposed. It has happened all over the periods but nothing has happened.

But the academy associates the bureaucracy. I agree, it is the bureaucracy to a certain point, but a part has been largely behind the resistance, but I also, I think,

point a finger of blame to the politician masters. They have not really pushed it through.

If you don't, you look at the reform efforts that have taken root in many countries in Southeast Asia and in South Asia, it is the politicians who decided change is right. When that decision is made, the bureaucracy somehow falls into line, whether they like it or not. But in this case in Bangladesh I think there has been a tendency to maintain the status quo as a result nothing has happened.

SCHALKWYK: So why have the politicians not been enthusiastic about reform?

KHAIR: *[chuckling] Probably, my take on this thing is probably they want to maintain the status quo, they don't want to rock the boat too much. I think, maintain things as they have been in the past.*

SCHALKWYK: Is there growing demand for reforms from other sectors?

KHAIR: *Civil society, yes, I think there is a growing demand. People are becoming more and more aware of this kind of service—I mean, there are grumbles within the civil society itself. Private sector also gripes about the bureaucracy not doing its part. I think the pressure from the public is also a bit absent, the general public as such. But I think the pressure is not there. I think there is a growing awareness that things need to be changed. There is an awareness but the pressure has not really built up among the citizens as such. That is probably another reason I think the politicians really haven't picked up on the idea—well, this is getting too much. That I think is the gist of what is really happening.*

SCHALKWYK: Who are the reform commissions typically submitting their reports to?

KHAIR: *To the government.*

SCHALKWYK: To the government, not to Parliament?

KHAIR: *No.*

SCHALKWYK: That's to the Prime Minister or—.

KHAIR: *The government in power, the Prime Minister, the President, whoever it is. So what happens in most of the cases they find a reform report is given, a committee or commission is found to examine that thing and that becomes a cycle by itself. It never gets to see the light of implementation. The other problem that has been, if you look at the historical, you see, governments here get elected for five years. If they don't undertake any reform efforts within the first two years after the second year they get focused on other things. So none of the governments have done that. Come up with a report agenda within the two years. When the PARC was formed, the government did form the PARC right in the first couple of years. But you know the PARC took a long time to give its report. But this time I think give had shifted its attention span somewhere.*

But even then, even then, you see PARC gave some interim recommendations to the government when this commission was with them, a lot of interim recommendations. But the problem with interim recommendations is none of them are implemented by the government. If the government were serious enough they could have done a lot of those things. But what they did is very simple stuff which are not actually noteworthy.

SCHALKWYK: Like what?

KHAIR: Oh, there was one time that you could, for example travel tax that you, for air travel. A long time before this used to be paid separately, now that comes within the ticket itself. So that was one thing that was done right away. Then there were things like how you patrol and stuff like that. Not too very important. Not to touch the structure neither the process. So the structure and the process has remained more and less archaic.

Now, for example, I'll give you the example a lot of times. The process is so heavily bureaucratic, this is one example, I think I can, maybe you can understand. If I'm working in the field level administration, I'm an assistant commissioner, exactly the big boss is my office boss, the company commissioner or superintendent of police, or the agriculture department. Now, there is something called the earned leave. We've got what is called casual leave and earned leave. We get—

SCHALKWYK: How do you spell that?

KHAIR: Earned.

SCHALKWYK: Okay. Earned leave.

KHAIR: Earned leave is a number of days that you put in service, number of days you have in your leave account every year. Now, for medical reasons or for studying, or for going abroad that casual leave is ten days, twenty days. If you want to have more leave, if you apply for earned leave usually you apply, then your boss says okay, and sends this to the next tier and goes to the next tier and then it lands in the ministry. I asked that question. Well, there's a lot of transaction costs involved in the stupid thing because to get this earned leave, what do you require? You earn two things, that you have leave in your account and your boss is willing to let you go. I ask my colleagues, are there more things than that? Then they say no, actually no. So now I ask why do you require for your leave application to come from the district office to the divisional office and from the divisional office to the ministry?

The answer they come up with is well, the ministry is your appointing authority. Then I point out to them that actually the appointing authority of the civil service is the President of Bangladesh. See, our appointment is done by the President but that appointment is delegated to the ministry. The ministry on behalf of the President appoints us. If that can be done, why a stupid thing like leave cannot be delegated at the local level, decentralized to the local level. It is the local boss who decides I'll let you go on leave. Another thing is that you have to have leave in the account. You don't need any other thing. The ministry, the Secretary of the Ministry of Establishment has no business poking his nose in that. I'm working in the field office, but it has to come to the ministry. That's an example of how things really work in the process orientation. I hope I've been able to—

SCHALKWYK: That makes sense. I wanted to ask you about pay policy within the civil service. [interruption] So what is pay policy in the Bangladeshi civil service?

KHAIR: Quite stupid. It is based on your rank, not on your performance. It is based on rank and scale. It is not based on performance. There is something called the increment, based on the scale you get an increment of maybe 200 or 300 Takas or 500 or 600 Takas added every year irrespective of how much work you're doing. So the person who is sitting on his backside all the time and there is a

person really toiling away will get the same increment, so it is not performance related at all. So there is no incentive that way. It is not on par with the private sector at all.

One of the reasons of corruption, I don't really agree with that, people point out in the civil services that they're low paid. Well that's not actually true. They're low paid but the corruption also comes from, I think, there is a lot of scope for you to take—you have a lot of discretion to take decisions on your own and there's no accountability. So corruption also creeps in that way. Pay is one of the factors, not "THE" factor. But pay is low basically. That adds to the low morale. Thinking what is going to happen, the guy works for the same pay as the guy who is not doing any work. That's a big motivation.

SCHALKWYK: So what are the accountability links like? How does accountability work within the public service?

KHAIR: There is very little accountability. I mean people are clamoring for accountability now. There's very little accountability. There is no accountability for what you do, what you don't do. So it is still based on the traditional system. And the politicians don't ask the civil service to be accountable for their needs. So that's another big problem. It is not performance based, it is not target oriented. So how do you make them make it accountable?

You can come up with the question. They will—what I've done is based on the law and blah, blah, blah, and process and stuff like that.

SCHALKWYK: Do you think there are particular aspects of the civil service that are, particularly Bangladeshi, are there aspects of Bangladeshi culture that affect the—?

KHAIR: Well, like all developing countries bureaucracy—[phone interruption]. There are cultural aspects within the civil service, there are. I mean, like all developing countries there are cultural aspects that really affect how we operate. The concept of helping out the family, the concept of helping out—that is there. It is probably there in all developing countries. It is not actually the Weberian model as such, it is not an ideal world. So it is there, it is obviously there. It is there and I think all developing countries have this problem.

SCHALKWYK: What are the most important reforms that are needed within the civil service at the moment?

KHAIR: What kind of reforms are needed?

SCHALKWYK: Most urgently and immediately.

KHAIR: If you asked me to prioritize it is basically most structural and post procedural. Okay? Structural, you see, ministries are doing certain things they shouldn't be doing. Ministries are only for policy making. If the ministry is getting involved in posting and transfer of minor officials or of college teachers or school teacher, the ministry is not supposed to do that. The ministries are supposed to give policy directions. But ministries get bogged down in all these processes. They shouldn't be doing that. I'll give you as an example. You see, there is a ministry called Civil Aviation and Tourism in Bangladesh. Now this ministry issues licenses and renews licenses for the airline, for travel agents. Interestingly previously the travel agents could go to the ministry and apply there. Now with the restrictions in the entry in the ministries nowadays they can't go and apply in person. They send it by post and the package will get lost and they suffer.

I told the other day, look, why does the ministry need to do this thing? They can delegate it to someone else, subcontract it out, or delegate it to a minor office and do it because people—the client cannot enter the ministry, how do you serve them? I know a case where the form has been sent, it has been received and got lost. Now this chap, the private sector individual is shouting that I have sent it by registered post. I have got proof that they received it. It's not my headache how it got lost. The ministry is saying that I don't have the document, I cannot renew your license and it becomes a catch 22 situation.

Now in the first place the ministry should not have been doing that because people don't have direct access to the ministry. You could delegate it somewhere else. So most ministries are doing something they shouldn't be doing; not something, most of the things they are doing. They should be delegating. So there should be structural reforms in the sense that delegation is already needed.

Then the process should be reworked. I mean, let the people within the ministry come up with ideas how to reform the process. It has been done in Malaysia, it has been done in Singapore. The consultant knows less than what the bureaucracy does. Let them come up with ideas how to do it in a much more simpler way within their regular framework. That kind of reform is necessary right now.

You ask the ministry. Remember when Clinton came to power the reforms that were done with Al Gore. They asked the different departments to identify rules that need to be thrown out. Same kind of thing could be done in the [Indecipherable 42:05]. You ask the departments what needs to be done. What needs to be done? But, you know, mind you there's a different catch. The way it worked in America might not work here. You have to say that what you need to do to deliver this kind of service. It has to be there. Because it worked in America because in American bureaucracy, by that time in the '90s, they realized they had to serve the civilians better. But this is something that, realization is there but not to that extent.

So if you want to do that you have to tell what do you need to change in order to do this or what you are required to change if you want to do this kind of target fulfillment. Then it might work. So I mean, it has to be home grown and agree, but the process needs to be trimmed. It is really ridiculous for someone applying for earned leave at the field level to go to the ministry. It doesn't make any sense at all. It doesn't make any sense at all.

SCHALKWYK: Have you been involved at all or are you familiar with the MATT-2 (Managing at the Top)?

KHAIR: *I was a participant in MATT-1.*

SCHALKWYK: How did MATT-1 work out?

KHAIR: *Well, MATT-1, it was a good program in the sense that it gave a lot of ideas to the people. I remember, I mean, my experience with MATT-1 is, I was junior of most people that were serving at the training academy there so I went as a faculty member. All of the men were seniors. I had been telling them these things work out there. So when they, after they had this, went to the UK and they saw first hand how things were working down there said, hey, you didn't mention these things when we were back. Yes, you didn't listen to me then. Some of the MATT-1 participants are now very senior civil servants like the Cabinet Secretary*

now is a MATT-1 participant. Many secretaries are also MATT-1 participants. I think they do realize that change if needed.

The problem with MATT-1 is that there was not—if you look, I think there was the right amount of why things didn't work in MATT-1. I think there was not big ownership of the government to allow the changing to really work. I mean, the government is in the position to allow people to bring about changes. The MATT-1 had this small progress that change is needed, sort of a change—. So the MATT-1 didn't really work well because those changes were not allowed to happen. There was not too much ownership from the government side on that.

MATT-2 is a very different structure. There they are asking you to come up with PIPs themselves.

SCHALKWYK: That's Performance Improvement Plans.

KHAIR: Yes. But I'm not too sure because those things are too minor to really bring about the changes. I've been asking the training center to really ask the ministries what kinds of PIPs are needed. The department saying this is what I—. Because what happens is the participant comes up with something very easy. Okay, they can work on, but that does not really necessarily mean they're going to add value to the whole reform process. It might have a very marginal value. The way I would have—well, maybe I'm thinking I would have done it. Maybe seeing it, I said, let the ministry identify what kind of changes they think are necessary and let the participants work on that, consultation with that. Ownership on the part of the ministry and then you have a sense of direction on the participants. I don't think some activities are working on those things. But I hear a lot of positive things about MATT. But I've got serious doubts how far they will add value.

SCHALKWYK: Do you think that's because it is driven by donors?

KHAIR: Probably, possibly that it is driven by the donors. Also there should be greater ownership within the civil service too, all these reforms. That's also true. I mean, MATT-2 I think has added to the capacity building a lot. But does it really help us to generate that critical mass? That's the question I have right now. But you know I'm a MATT-1 participant; I'm not a participant of the MATT-2 so I really don't know.

But you know you've got to ask this question to very senior civil servants who have been participants of MATT-1. They are, they can tell you what is really happening down there.

SCHALKWYK: Do you think, sort of to change tracks a little bit. Do you think that the Bangladeshi civil service has the skills to implement reforms that are needed?

KHAIR: Yes and no. Yes and no in the sense that there are people who are quite capable, but they need to be retrained in certain aspects to allow the changes to happen. The no side is there is a lot of resistance within the bureaucracy for any kind of changes. So you've got a yes and no facet to it. But, you know, I think the number of yes people are growing day-to-day. If you re-skill the civil servants to act in different ways there's a possibility that thinks might work out. But you know it has to be prioritized; this one first, then this one and this one and this one.

See, there are a lot, they talk about a lot of things but nothing happens. That's the problem with Bangladesh. You'll hear it a lot among all the—you see a lot of interesting ideas are there but nothing happens to those ideas. If someone says

okay, these are three ideas I'm going to implement in the next two years that's the first step.

Then you go to the next priority and that's the next priority. A lot of talk about doing things but nothing really happening. Nobody is going to—well, I say it like this. Who is going to bell the cat? Taking the first step. That's my understanding of the whole process. There are people who are out there who come to sort of a screening process, they are capable but they need to be retrained in the new techniques. Also to be able to re-think their position. I can give you one example.

I was teaching a class the other day of mid-level people. When there asking me I says—when I finally told them bluntly, if you guys don't change, your whole existence will be at stake, ten years, five years down the line because if you can't deliver, the private sector is going to take over. Okay, or the civil society is going to take over. I told them, look at the ODA that has gone to the civil society they didn't use since 1989.

SCHALKWYK: The what?

KHAIR: The Official Development Assistance. Most of this flows through the non-government sector because the government sector is not capable enough to do that. I don't know how you'll live if you chaps don't shape up, you have to shape up. Then there's realization. But you see, what's to be done? I think the government needs to take a very serious—well, like the Indian government is now doing. I don't know if you're aware of what the Indians are doing now. They are retraining the civil servants from the mid level, senior level, very senior level to you know cope with the challenges India faces today.

The very junior officials are allowed to go out and study and come back. Well, I would ask what is the amount of money that the Bangladesh government is investing in training. It is very minimum. The Bangladeshi government does not invest a lot in training of civil servants whereas the armed forces invest a lot. The Indians and the Pakistanis on the other side are allowing and funding civil servants to go and study abroad, come back and do the work. Okay, they're paid, the pay has gone up.

Now at the same time they have this mid term, small term, a lot of trainings spread out through their career that one gets to pick up skills. They have this training with American universities and local Indian schools for mid-level people. They have this training with Harvard and Institute of Management in Ahmedabad to train very senior civil servants. They have this training with Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy, the Maxwell School and KDI (Korea Development Institute) to serve mid-level people, different skills. This is not something that we are now doing.

Probably if you ask me why it's not happening, donors have somehow or other, abandoned civil service capacity building. I don't know why. They keep harping on them that the civil servants are not trained, but how far they're investing, except DFID (Department for International Development), they're not really investing a lot in the civil service capacity building. There's no use harping on that if you don't really help out with that. I suppose that donors can put down their foot and say to the government this funding does not come through to you for big projects if you do not re-train your civil servants and none of the donors have said that.

SCHALKWYK: I wonder, do you think donors would be able to push the government to act?

KHAIR: Donors have tried but they have not really tried hard enough I suppose. See, the example I gave you, if the donors say I will not give you money for this energy project until and unless you revamp your energy sector civil service, retrain them. They have not been able because donors have an agenda of their own you have to spend money—well, that's a different ball game, that's a different racket. Donors have not been persistent, from my analysis, they have not been persistent in capacity building.

I'll give you an example. World Bank which set up this PAC, Public Administration Center, back in the '80s did not contribute anything to capacity building up civil servants for the area. They came up with an excuse, when I was trying to push it, I was in the ERD and they said, the government doesn't listen to us. Well there are times when the government listens to the World Bank when the World Bank puts down its feet and says I'm not going to give you money if you don't do that. In this case I think the donor had not been strong enough to do that. So there are possibilities the donors can force the government to make some changes for capacity building.

Then they can, I think, also help the government to enhance the capacity of the civil servants. Then the government also should spend some money. They cannot look at donors all the while and look heavenwards and say we didn't expect money. They should have an ownership of what is really happening. The Indians have—they're spending money on their own to groom up the civil service. They have realized that they need, to meet the challenges you have to change them.

SCHALKWYK: Do you think there are small areas where reforms could be tried by particular secretaries, joint secretaries, district commissioners?

KHAIR: Yeah, I mean look, there's one way of looking at it. If people will, I'll give you another story. One of the senior civil servants who was an academic also, an academic and I remember, he used to come up with two things, in the civil service many are headless, in the civil service this thing is turned off and this thing is pulled out.

SCHALKWYK: The head is turned off.

KHAIR: Turned off and then your backbone is pulled out.

SCHALKWYK: Okay.

KHAIR: If the senior secretaries are given the leeway of saying look, you become an innovator, you try to bring about something and if that innovation is recognized by the government, I think it is going to work.

SCHALKWYK: So what would happen if a secretary were to try something?

KHAIR: Secretaries don't try because if it turns wrong they get blamed for it.

SCHALKWYK: So they're afraid of making mistakes.

KHAIR: But mistakes are a part of the learning process, one has to realize that.

SCHALKWYK: But they're afraid of making—

KHAIR: Yes. But if given the chance I think some of them would be able to do that. I think some of them should be able to do that, let's see how it tries. You try to make an innovation, let's see how it tries. But they get blamed a lot—. [interruption]. It's possible, it's not impossible. I don't think it is totally impossible right now. But you have to give them some leeway. You try things, we're going to help you out. What kind of resources we're going to give you based on changes. That's going to work I suppose. But that message has to be clearly spelled out by the politicians, otherwise the bureaucracy is not going to work.

There's another factor working there. I don't know whether you're aware that after 25 years of service if you put in 25 years the government can kick you out any time without citing any reasons.

SCHALKWYK: It can remove you.

KHAIR: Yes, so that is the reason most of the senior secretaries have put in 25 years so they are—.

SCHALKWYK: Where would you normally be on your career path after 25 years?

KHAIR: Well you should have become a secretary by that time. You should have, 25 years plus. Most of the secretaries right now have been 25 years plus of service, maybe more. Many of them are retiring or something. So they're always under the assumption, if things don't work I'll get kicked out. I can become on OSD, Officer on Special Duty. They are risk-averse. They don't want to take big risks. This has to be a political understanding should be there. People should be allowed to take risks, to at least change things. Otherwise, if you don't take risks changes will not happen.

SCHALKWYK: Okay.

KHAIR: If you look at the Malaysian case, Malaysia has taken years to bring about changes. The Indians have started later on, but the Indians have started carrying out reforms and the bureaucracy now is in tune of how things are supposed to work differently. But unfortunately, contrast to Bangladesh, nothing has happened. I think the reasons are two, its resistance within bureaucracy at one time and a complete lack of political will to push within. Those are the two main factors you would find.

SCHALKWYK: Do you have anything else you'd like to add before we finish?

KHAIR: No. If you need anything else, I can always help you out later on.

SCHALKWYK: Thank you very much.