



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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SCHALKWYK: Today is the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2009. I'm here with Mr. Syed Tanveer Hussain, at ideas Manzil in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Before we start the interview, Mr. Hussain, could I ask that you've given your consent for this interview?

HUSSAIN: Yes, I have.

SCHALKWYK: Excellent. Before we talk about civil service reform in Bangladesh, I'd just like to find out a little bit more about your career and the positions you've held in the past. Could you very, very briefly tell me about the positions you've held, and what you're currently doing?

HUSSAIN: *I have been in government service since the Pakistan days, which is 1970, and I got my civil service training in Pakistan. Then I escaped from Pakistan, and came into Bangladesh in 1971. After the liberation of Bangladesh, I joined government service here. I've been working for 34 years in the government, and then I retired towards the second half of 2004.*

*Since then, I've been working—I retired as Environment Secretary, so I set up an environment company and I called it the Climate Change Company, and that has been doing assignments for UNDP (United Nations Development Program), GTZ (German Development Agency), the World Bank, ADB (Asian Development Bank), etc.*

*Right now, I'm a consultant mainly to the World Bank. While I was in government service, let me begin at the beginning, I started off in the Ministry of Finance, followed by various other assignments in more than half a dozen different ministries, at various levels. In Bangladesh, you know, you have what is known as the hierarchy. It begins at the lowest level. The bottom rung is the Assistant Secretary, followed by the Deputy Secretary, followed by the Joint Secretary, and then Additional Secretary, and Secretary.*

*In each one of these positions, you have to spend at least three years before you can move to a higher level, sometimes more. So therefore, I finished off—I started at Assistant Secretary level, and moved up to the level of Secretary. I was Secretary—when I first began my service as Secretary, I was Secretary Ministry of Planning, in charge of the statistics division. During that period, I conducted the Bangladesh census, 2001. The census takes place once every ten years, so I was fortunate to get the tenth year in 2001 to become the Census Commissioner. That report was used for the elections last time, about two months ago, and successfully carried out.*

*After being the Secretary of Planning, I left there and went into the Ministry of Housing and Public Works. I spent some time there, and then I moved to the Ministry of Textiles, as Secretary. I was also earlier posted as the Joint Secretary in Textiles. So, after Textiles, I came to Environment, and that's where I remained until I retired in 2004. So, this more or less is a summation of my career, academic-wise, and with regard to professionally.*

*Academically speaking, I've done my Honors in Economics from Dhaka University, and my Masters from the Center for Development Economics, Williams College, Massachusetts. After that, I went and did—prior to that, I was in Australia for a year and a half, moving around with various multi-nationals, such as BHP (BHP Billiton), General Motors, Siemens, Alcoa, Reserve Bank of Australia, ANZ Bank, and about another dozen organizations where I spent several weeks at a time to get to know the feel of how they run their financial*

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*management systems, because at that time I was working in the Ministry of Finance in Bangladesh.*

*After Australia, I went to Korea for a spot of training. Then there were several various short courses, like the Institute of—International Law Institute in Washington, DC, George Washington University, where I did a course in international loan negotiations and re-negotiations. So, that about sums up my academic career.*

*I've visited many, many countries during my service career, in my official capacity, at various levels, and doing various things. Thank you.*

SCHALKWYK: Okay, and after your retirement, or—sorry, before your current position, you produced a report for the Bangladeshi government on public administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for Bangladesh. Could you tell me a little bit about that report? How was it set up?

HUSSAIN: *While I was in the Ministry of Textiles one fine morning, the Prime Minister calls me up, and I report to her, and she says to me that, "I want you to write—I've just joined the government, and I want that you should do a report on how to rationalize and downsize and right-size the government." So, the report, we called it, To Review and Rationalize the Organizational Set-Up and Existing Manpower in the Ministries, Divisions, Departments, and Offices of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.*

*This was a two-volume report, and it took me several—the Prime Minister agreed to give me four or five extra hands to work on the report, and she gave me a completely clean slate. All she said was "Look at all the previous reports, and make a recommendation as to how I should downsize the government." So, the committee that was set up, I was the Chairman, and we got all the reports together. My very first sentence in the report says, and almost sums up the entire report itself, and the entire malaise that is prevailing now in the Bangladesh bureaucracy. The first sentence is "How do you carry out reforms in a situation where the reformer and the target of reforms are one and the same?"*

SCHALKWYK: So, before we go on any further, can I ask you what year was this that you started the report?

HUSSAIN: *2002 I submitted the report.*

SCHALKWYK: Okay. All right, and who else was on the—worked with you on the report?

HUSSAIN: *There were some deputy secretaries who worked with me. I was the Chairman, and there was an officer on special duty, a deputy secretary, and two officers on special duty, and a joint secretary.*

SCHALKWYK: And how were they selected?

HUSSAIN: *They were selected by the Prime Minister's Office. Several of them had already worked in the Establishment Division of the government, so they knew what the rules and regulations were, especially in organization and management, O and M. The Prime Minister's mandate gave clear cut instructions to every single ministry, division, department, and office, that any piece of paper that this committee wants, should be made available.*

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*So, these four officers who worked under me spent most of the time collecting data. I spent most of my time putting that data into computers, and then collating them, and extrapolating one or two of them to suit my requirements, and trying to prove to the government that the government was far too big, and needed massive surgical operations in certain areas, especially at the lower levels. So, when I said "How do you carry out reforms in a situation where the target and the reformer are the same—one and same person?" It gives you a pretty clear idea of what reformers face in Bangladesh when they try to carry out reforms.*

*In Bangladesh, there have been so far 17 different administrative reform committees and reorganization commissions. So, what I did basically, was to take all these committee reports, put them all in one format, find out how many had been—how many reforms and recommendations had been implemented, how many had not been implemented, and what needs to be done to implement them. The thing is that when a new government comes into power, they have this missionary zeal to turn everything upside down, inside out, and have a new Bangladesh.*

*At the end of the day, once my report came out and I had placed all the facts on the table, and I had met the Prime Minister about three times one on one, she wanted to know more and more about each aspect of the reforms. And by the time we finished, it came to pass that it would be very difficult to implement many of the reforms. And so, I told the Prime Minister that you may not probably be able to start reducing the number of ministries right away, but there are various other reforms which you could carry out. I'll explain that to you a bit later, but one—let me start by explaining the fact and the reasons behind why reforms don't take place in countries such as Bangladesh and other less developed countries.*

*Firstly, because they face resistance. And why do they face resistance? There may be several reasons.*

SCHALKWYK: Resistance from whom?

HUSSAIN: I'll explain that.

SCHALKWYK: Okay.

HUSSAIN: *If the reform efforts are not supported politically by the party in power, and also by the opposition, then reforms will not materialize. Quite often, it has been observed that the proposals made by the reform commissions and committees are often put aside due to political considerations. Sometimes when there is too much politics, the matter is referred to, by that government, to another committee for a second opinion, so as to prolong the matter and keep the pressure groups quiet.*

*One of the main reasons why reforms do not take place is when the reform package has not been clearly explained to the public at large, and the bureaucracy. This leads to confusion and misinterpretation. And one of the principal reasons why bureaucrats don't want to carry out reforms is because politicians sometimes bluntly attack civil servants for their inertia, inabilities, and inefficiencies, which result in a built-in resistance to reforms.*

*The final and most important reason applicable in a country such as Bangladesh is; if the bureaucracy has the impression that it is more powerful than the political regime of the day, there will be resistance to change. Therefore, any*

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*recommendation that is not favorable to the civil servant is likely, as has happened in many developing countries, not to materialize.*

*Apart from this, there is a tendency to imitate or emulate western techniques and ideas without making any pre-judgement as to whether these so-called modern techniques are suitable to Bangladesh's needs. So, these are some of the reasons why reforms do not take place.*

SCHALKWYK: So, just before you continue, can I ask you in what ways would the Bangladeshi bureaucracy consider itself more powerful than the political regime?

HUSSAIN: *In a country such as Bangladesh and Pakistan, to which we belonged once upon a time, there are three main political parties they say. One is the political parties themselves, the second is the armed services, and the third is the bureaucracy. The reason why the bureaucracy considers itself powerful, and the army considers itself more powerful than the bureaucracy, and the political parties are left out in the—out on a limb, as it were, is simply because these are the only two organized functioning set-ups in countries such as ours. Everything else is in a fluid state. So, all orders have to be carried out by the political government through the bureaucracy. And if the politician himself is inexperienced, unable, incapable, or unwilling to talk to his senior bureaucrats in the ministries, then the bureaucrats take advantage of the politician, and manage to hedge their bets and get things done which normally a seasoned politician would not allow to get done say in England, or in the United States, or even China, for example.*

*So, this is the way the situation is. Now, is it really necessary to carry out reforms in Bangladesh? We have a functioning bureaucracy, but there are several reasons now when we feel that it is imperative that reforms should be carried out. Number one is the globalization of markets, advances in science and technology, other emergent and vibrant civil societies. There is a domestic and foreign pressure to reduce corruption, to increase transparency. Unfettered exchanges of information across borders have created complex new interdependencies, and the national system has to not only adapt it, but to recognize it and manage it. So therefore, all these reasons require that we should have a bureaucracy which is functional and state of the art.*

*Now, what in essence are the characteristics of a bureaucracy that Bangladesh should emulate or try to implement? Number one, it should be merit based, and politically neutral. The Constitution says that the civil servants in Bangladesh are servants of the state, not of the government in power. So, regardless of who the government in power is, you are a servant of the state and the Republic of Bangladesh. This may not seem to be very important to an onlooker, but this is the essence and the reason for all the tussle and fights between the political bosses who run the government, and civil servants who answer to the state. So, one of the basic characteristics of a future bureaucracy should be that it should be merit based and it should be politically neutral.*

*It should be well structured and right-sized. Right-sized meaning, England has ten or twelve ministries, Japan has ten or twelve ministries, Bangladesh has 49. So, this is not the right size, certainly not for a country with a GDP (Gross Domestic Product) like ours, as compared to Britain and UK, and Japan. So, it should be accountable, professional, and generally free of corruption. This is a very thoughtful statement, but how far it can be implemented remains to be seen.*

*It should be relatively autonomous, responsive, and it should be well trained, performance oriented, and relatively open. These should be the basic*

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*characteristics of a civil service which will—all these put together will involve changes in four fundamental areas. One is the structure of the bureaucracy. Number two is the program through which you want to implement and create that structure. And once you have created that structure, then the performance of that structure, the performance of the bureaucrats. And finally, once all three are in position, then you go to the processes, and keep examining the processes by monitoring and evaluation, and oversight, so that all four points and elements of this structure are working in tandem with each other.*

*Now, the aim and objective of this report that I had given to the Prime Minister sums up more or less everything that should be done based on the previous 17 reports. Once I had found out by superimposing one report on the other, and I had a column which said that these are the reports that have not been implemented, then we sat down and we decided on what the long-term implementation of reforms entailed, and what the short-term and medium-term entailed, and we put them according to that priority.*

SCHALKWYK: Just before we move on, what sort of reforms had been implemented?

HUSSAIN: *Earlier?*

SCHALKWYK: Yes, of the other reports' recommendations.

HUSSAIN: *You will see in my statement, just go through it, many of the reforms that had not been implemented, maybe of the reforms had been implemented, but in a haphazard, half-hearted manner. And most of them were—the reforms that were what you might wish to call “The low hanging fruits”, which means that it doesn't disturb either party, the political side. And they did the same thing with my report also. Some of the report, some of the recommendations I had made have yet to be carried out. But most of the reform did—dealt with pay and services, and they didn't try to hammer out a new bureaucracy as such. Different officers were given different little—some of my observations with regard to formation of a Supreme Court Secretariat and Ombudsman—Ombudsman has still to be recommended and get approved.*

*And, for example, the Public Administrative Reform Commission, they talked about things like early retirement, simplification of the payments procedures of pensions, vehicle entitlements, grade-wise instead of class-wise identification of employees. These are little minor things which they suggested, because this wouldn't hurt the overall bureaucracy itself. But once I had got the reform packages examined, and come out with a list of to-do's, what had not been done, I then studied the Chinese system and the Japanese system, and the British system, and the Indian-Pakistani Systems, and the Malaysians. And then, based on those studies, I found there were lots of reforms in these countries which were implemented which Bangladesh had done, and there were lots of pending reforms which Bangladesh had not done, which these countries had implemented.*

*One of the biggest problems I found in the Bangladesh bureaucracy is getting officers to move out of the urban areas and work in the rural areas, because nobody wanted to leave Dhaka. How do you get to solve this problem? So, we kept studying, and I studied the Chinese system, and the Chinese system had some fantastic ideas, which I recommended that we should follow. Number one is that you get a pay and you get allowances. So, when you get paid and you get allowances, if your pay is the same in Dhaka as it is in the boondocks, in the*

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*villages of Bangladesh, you wouldn't feel like moving, because there are no schools, colleges for your children, there are no medical facilities, etc.*

*So, for example, in the defense services, when they move from Dhaka to the remote areas of the Hill Tracts, they solved the entire issue by which army officers would stay in the Hill Tracts. The—all the other ministries got allowances at a very low level, along with their pay, but the defense guys had huge allowances. The result was that nobody objected to going and working in the Hill Tracts.*

*In China, this is exactly what they did. When they wanted to open up Shenzhen, and they wanted to open up some other areas in the most remote god-forsaken places in China, where they wanted to set up export processing zones and things like that, what they did—what the Chinese government did was they asked the bureaucrats in Beijing to move, and the bureaucrats wouldn't move. So, they suggested to the bureaucrats that you'll get your pay, and you'll get allowances which is about 10, 15, or 20 times more than the normal bureaucrat in Beijing.*

*So, in a flash, the most brilliant bureaucrats moved to the absolutely remote areas of China. And the result of that was that because the bureaucrats who were smart moved out, they took with them the various projects which were to be implemented in the rural areas, like schools, roads, health facilities, so that their children could get an education. So, just by—simply by increasing the allowances by about five-fold or ten-fold, depending on the area, they managed to move these people out, and the whole of China then began to develop in a massive way.*

*So, in Bangladesh, what I have suggested is, and we have seen this in the defense services, it works, it works like magic, all you have to do is to increase the allowances in a very big way, and leave it to the officers to decide if they want to go or not. And Bangladesh is a much smaller country than China, much easier to implement reforms. Although there are areas in Bangladesh now, even now, where it would take you a day to travel and get to the local thana (police stations) or subdivision, the local administrative unit. But these can be easily sorted out by giving these people higher allowances.*

*The other big problem that Bangladesh faces is, you know, we have four categories of service; class one, class two, class three, and class four. Class one is a category which consists of people like us who pass the civil service examination. There are hardly few hundred people. Class two, class three, and class four; class three are the people who are the clerks, the typists, the messenger boy—the class four are the messenger boys, the various stenotypists, stenographers. They have different names for the same thing, just to sanction more posts, and in my report I submitted a five or eight page list of designations all performing the same duties.*

*Once you have these four categories and you find that more than 50% to 60% of the government consists of class three, all you have to do is make a surgical operation, and cut off the class three, bring it down to the level of the other three or four classes. How do you do this? Very simple, you cannot, for example, tomorrow decide, like the Chinese could, we cannot, because we are political and we have a democratic system going. So, what you do is allow these people to retire, along with attrition, and not allow any more recruitment in this area.*

*So, then how do you get the janitors, and how do you get the cleaners, and the guards, and other things in the Secretariat if there are no more public servants*

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*considered as guards and cleaners, etc, and janitors? The answer is very simple. Every single item should be outsourced to the private sector. And the private sector should be responsible for maintaining the buildings, the offices, and the computer systems, and everything else. Initially, there will be resistance if you try to do it too quickly, but eventually when the attrition starts to take place, and when you don't start by recruiting people, but the private sector guys who get in and use these contracts, and utilize these contracts, they might wish to keep some of the old permanent employees in their employ, because they have a feel for the situation.*

*Not all of them will be employed, but they can go into other work, because when you start outsourcing, then you develop dozens of outsourcing companies doing different things. So, the government officers at that level, who get thrown out of government, can easily go back in and join the private sector. They will also become, in the process, much more efficient and honest. This was one of the recommendations of my report as to how to encourage government officers to move to the districts, because if you try to run the government by administrative fiat from headquarters in Dhaka, nothing ever gets done. One of the most important issues was this one.*

*Now, the other reason why Bangladesh bureaucracy is in the present state that it is, is because we didn't do something—in 1947, when we became independent, and we became India and Pakistan, Pakistan failed to do something which India did, and that was—in 1951, India passed a civil service act. It was a one-page act, which says there shall be civil services in the Republic of India, and they shall frame their own rules. In Bangladesh, that didn't happen. What happened was something that ultimately went in favor of the bureaucracy to keep the status quo and stagnancy prevailing, and that was because of the Constitution, and a certain clause in the Constitution, which was misinterpreted.*

*The Constitution, Part 9, and the Services of Bangladesh, Chapter 1, Para 133; Para 133 is the para of the Constitution which relates to the civil service and how it should be formed. And it reads in the following manner, "Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, Parliament may by law regulate the appointment and conditions of service of persons in the service of the Republic." This is all very fine, so far so good. Then comes the next clause, "Provided that it shall be competent for the President to make rules regulating the appointment and the conditions of service of such persons until provision in that behalf—". This is the most important and operative phrase in the entire article, "—until provision in that behalf is made by or under any law, and rules so that so made shall have effect subject to the provisions of any such law."*

*This means very clearly and very simply, that the President will continue to act on the recommendation of the Prime Minister until provisions for a civil service act and various civil service orders are issued. Now, what the bureaucrats did, people like us who were in the bureaucracy for 30 years, we found this to be a very convenient ruse to avoid having a civil service act involving every single service having different rules and regulations, which India did. And how did we do that? We would take a file up to the Prime Minister, let's say somebody has to be given an extension in service, an extension in service cannot be given by the government, by government order, it cannot be given by the Prime Minister, it has to be given—cleared by the President sitting in office. So, the Prime Minister sends the recommendation to the President, and the President recommends—usually recommends, because he is more or less always—has been beholden to the Prime Minister and the government of the day.*

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*By doing this, we never had a distinct clear-cut set of service rules for all the bureaucracy; and that is the reason for the present degradation in the bureaucracy; and that is the reason why bureaucracy considers itself impotent and demoralized, and there is a general lack of discipline, widespread irregularities, and decline in the quality of personnel. Because if you had civil service regulations for every single different service, then you would have recruitment, and you would have clear-cut guidelines on how each service should be run. That was not done. And many people feel that the administrative service, which had the biggest numbers, as well as the largest workforce, they tended to dominate the rest of the other services.*

*And then you had, of course, the other problem of people who came in from Pakistan—from the Pakistan civil service, and entered the government service. In Bangladesh what happened was what was the province of East Pakistan, became the nation of Bangladesh. So, the provincial service of East Pakistan became the national service of Bangladesh. And the people who were the officers of the central government of Pakistan came here and almost felt like orphans, because the civil service then became dominated by the so-called provincial services of that time. And the administrative service of the central government of Pakistan joined hands with the administrative service of the provincial service of Pakistan, and called themselves Bangladesh Civil Service Administration.*

*The rest of the crowd, the other central services, were left out in the cold. So, they had to fend for themselves. So, they didn't fend for themselves too well over the last 30 years, and therefore, there has been a constant conflict between various divisions. And I have made very clear-cut suggestions on how to resolve this issue.*

SCHALKWYK: So, I wonder if you could tell me about the reception your report received? Who did you submit the report to?

HUSSAIN: *I submitted the report to the Prime Minister of the day, and she called me up and asked me to explain it. So, I explained it to her on the basis of a 35 minute PowerPoint presentation, slide by slide I explained everything that I have just told you, as well as much more. And once I explained it to her, she said, "You're asking me to downsize government to this level? I don't think that's going to be logical or possible." I said, "Yes, I know, but you—that was the terms of reference that I had." So then I said—suggested to her that here are various other ways you can achieve the same goal without saying downsize or right-size or, you know, rationalize, and I have several recommendations.*

*So, I read out all the recommendations. This was one meeting I had with the Prime Minister. A few weeks later, again I was called by the Prime Minister, and these were both one on one meetings with the Prime Minister, nobody else was around. So, she took a second reading of the entire thing, asked me to explain the entire PowerPoint presentation once again. Second time, she understood everything absolutely fully and correctly. And then, I was told that I would be called to address the senior-most bureaucrats of the government; about five of them, and the senior-most ministers of the government; about ten of them. And the Prime Minister would chair the meeting and I would make the same presentation that I made to the Prime Minister.*

SCHALKWYK: So, what positions were the bureaucrats? Who were—?

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*HUSSAIN: Cabinet Secretary, Establishment Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, and one or two other relevant secretaries.*

SCHALKWYK: Okay.

*HUSSAIN: So, there were no juniors around, and this was a highly confidential meeting. So, I gave—I was supposed to speak for about half an hour, I spoke for an hour and a half, and then I was questioned for another half an hour or 45 minutes, and then the Prime Minister said, "Okay, this report is approved. Send it to the Establishment Division for implementation, and I will tell you which points to implement." And the Prime Minister gave certain very quick hits, because I had given the Prime Minister some quick hits on how to get the reform process going, but at the same time, not sound antagonistic to the opposition in Parliament.*

*So, the first recommendation I had made was that in the civil service there is no provision for handicapped, and there is no provision for people who appear in the civil service and have to fight with absolutely normal human beings gone through the education system. So, there should be a special quota, like they have in Malaysia, and give that quota to the handicapped people. So, that was implemented forthright, and it's now absolutely sort of de rigueur to go anywhere in any part of the civil service, and anybody who is handicapped and can pass the exam, will go through the special quota and become a civil servant.*

*Then there were various other recommendations I had made. Some of them were relating to how to computerize the government of Bangladesh. Bangladesh government is now talking about digital Bangladesh. Well, what I did was, since I was Environment Secretary at that time, I got the Canadian CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) to bring in one or two consultants, and we did a complete mapping of the entire Environment Ministry; the number of computers, and the number of rooms, and where they were located. And simultaneously, make recommendations as to number of computers that ought to be there, printers that ought to be there, and the rooms—where they ought to be. And we made a complete format in a sort of template form, so that if one had to look at the Environment Ministry's computerization plan, one could create the same computerization plan for the Science and Technology Ministry, for the Labor Ministry, for any other ministry.*

*The thinking behind this was that if the government had given an order saying that here is a report which is an example of computerization in the Environment Ministry, and in the appendix to the report is a series of templates which each ministry will fill up, and within three months, you give me a computerized plan for your ministry. So, you would have every ministry submitting the report in the same format. You wouldn't have any difficulty in collating all of them, and coming up with the number of computers you need, and the number of printers you need, and the number of personnel you need, and the rooms you need.*

*So, that was given, everybody agreed to it, but nothing has happened until today, because this involves getting ministries into a bind, into some kind of an exercise which will force them to agree to government decisions in future. So, especially with regard to computerization, and which they would not like to do, and remain independent. That was one of the recommendations I had made.*

*In regard to the Foreign Ministry, for example, I had made a certain recommendation based on the American civil service. In the American diplomatic service, when I had gone to meet—and in those days the Energy Minister in America was Bill Richardson, and I went to a conference there, and I found out*

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*that Bill Richardson had called in a dozen ambassadors from the Caspian region on the power and energy sector, and I was then Additional Secretary in the Energy Ministry. So, I went and listened to them, and I found something very amazing which the Americans were doing. One of the ambassadors in the Caspian region, I forget where—which country, had opened up a special office in his own embassy, and he had used a local lady as a secretary in that office. So, any Americans coming in for investing into that country, let's say "Country X", he would have the facilities of a secretary speaking the local language, arranging tickets, arranging travel plans, arranging appointments, everything, through that office. The result would be that the main embassy would not be harassed by dozens of businessmen coming in and asking for this, that, and the other.*

*There was a room; they had to pay \$40 a day for the use of that person, and the embassy earned quite a bit of money also. And based on this, the investments in those countries went up. I had suggested this for the Bangladesh Foreign Office, especially for wherever we have embassies, to employ local nationals, give them a room, because whenever any big-wig goes from Bangladesh to one of the missions, let's say Abu Dhabi, Washington, or Calcutta, or London, Paris, the big shots usually expect the ambassador to be at the airport.*

*If the ambassador is not at the airport, the second in command ought to be there. This was okay with the political bosses, because they felt that it was a right, that they should be received according to protocol. Then when it comes down to very rich or important businessmen expecting people to come to the airport, it becomes a bit difficult, because most of the embassy staff are on the roads between the airport and the embassy most of the time. So, it would have—it still is quite a difficult situation which cannot be sorted out unless you have this kind of an office functioning, and you keep passing everybody on, deflecting them to this office. And the local lady, whether she's Italian in Rome, or Armenian in Armenia, wherever—Jordan, Saudi Arabia, it can be done.*

*I was posted for several years in Saudi Arabia, and I had a lady who did all this work, of course, at embassy expense, but it got on very well, because we didn't have to—we were not disturbed all the time by—because in a place like Saudi Arabia, which is impossible to work in, in terms of getting appointments, in terms of getting work done, their pace and their style of operation is totally different, which would only be, what you call, understood by this lady at the counter. You wouldn't be able to understand it if you went in and started talking about business, because they spend ten minutes—the first ten minutes asking you how you are, and you keep asking them how they are. Then they get down to business, and then that business takes one appointment, two appointments, three appointments, several appointments, before even the first move is made.*

*So, the Middle East is all like that, it's their tradition. You can't blame them. They don't like to do things in a hurry. So, and they have the money to take the luxury of not doing things in a hurry. So, it's people like us who need the money and who need to get things done in a hurry who get impatient, especially those of us who have been working in the western mode of conduct. So, this was one of the recommendations I had made.*

*The most important recommendation I had made, which has not yet been carried out; you see, you have a system here where government officers are sent out for studies abroad, in-house training, etc., but when they come back the study—for example, I've done a study in development economics at the Center for Development Economics in Williams, and I come back and I should normally be*

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*employed either in the Ministry of Finance or in the Ministry of External Resources, which deals with funding, or Planning Commission.*

*Now, if I belong to that administrative service, I might end up as Commissioner of Chittagong division, which has absolutely no semblance of any kind with the kind of work that I have been doing. And then I might end up in the Health Ministry. And then I might end up in the Land Ministry. So, the Williams degree that I had came to no use until many, many years later, when I became a Secretary, and I required—I had to get an overall perspective at the macro level to conduct micro level projects.*

*So, in order to get things streamlined, and there was a lot of frustration amongst the bureaucrats, because the administrative service tended to get most of the scholarships, the other services got less. Everybody got a little bit, but not too much. So, in order to avoid this difficulty, I suggested that there should be a division in the ministries and government, and the government should be divided into three functional clusters. And this is not my own recommendation, all the recommendations that I have made in my report are a concentrated version of recommendations which have made and not carried out earlier, from earlier reports.*

*So, in this case, I had suggested that there should be three functional clusters: administrative and management, economic, and socio-physical infrastructures, because right now, you have a situation where an engineer, and a generalist, and a scientist, and an economist, are all in the same situation, and in the same pot, as it were. So, based on that, you could have three different public service commissions instead of one public service commission. One public service commission would be for general services, for the administrative guys. The second service would be technical services. And the third would be socio-physical and educational services.*

*Now, let me just give you the response that I got once this report came out and some of the people in the bureaucracy—junior level, mid-level, and senior level read this report. This idea of having the administrative services—the entire government divided into three clusters went down extremely well with the mid-level bureaucrats, because then you see if you belong to—excuse me.  
(INTERRUPTION)*

SCHALKWYK: This is Part Two of the interview Mr. Syed Tanveer Hussain. So, if you'd like to continue, you were talking about the different—the response to the different—setting up different groups within the civil service.

HUSSAIN: *Yes, then in my recommendations, besides the division of the ministries into three functional categories—*

SCHALKWYK: So that you were saying that—what was the response to your—to that recommendation?

HUSSAIN: *Tremendously positive from the junior level cadres of the various services, because then you know they have a sense of direction. If you do your—if you are in the administrative service and you've gone for an administrative course to Harvard, or to Oxford, or some other place, you come back, you know that you are going to join back into your own cluster, and you can move up, and fight within your cluster, instead of fighting with everybody. So, this went down very well, but it hasn't been able, and it hasn't been implemented.*

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*One of the other recommendations I had made was a Supreme Court Secretariat. That's been implemented, and—as part of this report. Then there was a positive discrimination in favor of women. That also has been implemented. It was already implemented, but it's been implemented in a much bigger way. Reservation of one percent of all civil posts for the handicapped, that's been implemented.*

*The problem with the implementation aspect of any report, anywhere in the government involving the bureaucracy having to implement the report is very simple. I had recommended the setting up, by looking at the Malaysian experience, of an Administrative Services Performance Improvement Division (ASPID). ASPID, taken from the Malaysian version, take the reports, and the Committee—Performance Improvement Division is set up in the Prime Minister's Office, no less, and that tells every single ministry what to do, and why it's not being done if it is not done.*

*And I had also suggested that trying to implement this report through the normal file-work of the government will never succeed, and this is exactly what has happened. The Committee has yet to be set up, the files move from these reports, people do cherry-picking, they take up those ones which are easy to implement, and deliver that to the government in power, and the policies are then formed, and everybody is very happy.*

*I'd also recommended that the retirement age of public servants should move from 57 to 60 years.*

SCHALKWYK: Why was that?

HUSSAIN: *Because 57 is—in these days—when Bangladesh—when this order was issued in the years when 57 was retirement age, the Bangladesh longevity was 35 years. Now the Bangladesh longevity is almost near 60 years. So, retiring at 57—I have, for example, retired at 57; on the day I was 57. And since then, I've been working almost as many hours, if not more hours than when I was in government service; with all these various consultancies and various people who come in here and do jobs. In a way it's good, because having spent 34 years in government, I find it much easier than most of the other people to get things done in the government, and the biggest problem in Bangladesh for any foreigner is getting things done in the government, moving things along.*

*So, that has become a sort of forte for me, to be able to get people to deliver in spite of their not liking to deliver. So, these were some of the recommendations that I had made. The most important recommendation of dividing up the civil service into various priority areas has yet to be implemented.*

*In terms of legal reforms, I had suggested, especially with regard to Article 133 of the Constitution, that this was not done, still has not been done, probably needs to be done. In terms of improving efficiency, I'm now concluding my statement to you; greater use of outsourcing is one of my recommendations. While maintaining the uniform pay scale system, increase the allowances tremendously in a big way, so that people can move out and work in the rural areas of Bangladesh. Every Ministry and Division is to submit a five-year computerization plan within three months on the basis that I have already given in my report. This does not require a rocket scientist to prepare. All you need to do is each ministry should farm out these jobs to private sector companies, and ask them to fill up the format according to the templates given.*

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*Setting up of an Administrative Performance Services Division; that has not been done. The retirement age to go from 57 to 60; that has not been done. One percent of civil service posts for the handicapped; that has been done. Supreme Court and the Judiciary have been separated by the government. Right now there is a Supreme Court Secretariat, but the Ombudsman is yet to see the light of day.*

*In terms of career development, all ministries should be computerized. There should be a senior management pool. When you have the entire government divided into clusters, from those clusters, you give everybody a chance to take the bright ones out and create a senior management pool. That senior management pool and those officers in that pool will have the ability and the right to move into any ministry at any time on a posting, because they are above average—considered above average.*

*I had also examined 29 ministries and 17 big corporations. Each one of these I recommended a lot of rationalization in terms of manpower. 231 organizations this report examined. Not only this report, it was the rehashing, as it were, of various other 16 or 17 administrative reforms commissioned reports, and we put them all together in this book so that the government in power could just go ahead and keep examining these things and implementing these things one by one. It can still be done, and I'm positive that in the fullness of time it will be done. That's all I have to say.*

SCHALKWYK: So did you get any feedback from ministries themselves?

HUSSAIN: *No, this report has not been circulated. This report has been given to the Establishment Division, and the Establishment Division is implementing it. Unfortunately, they never mention my name or committee's name. They quietly use it as if they have—it came out of their heads. So, it doesn't really matter as long as the job gets done. But the other reports and the committees have all their names of people Shamsul Haque, and Muyeed Chowdhury, and Nurunnabi, and everybody else, as the committee heads. This is the only report that has not been circulated, because of the—some of the reforms being too sensitive and not being implemented. But otherwise, all in all, this report is still being used in the government for implementation of various aspects.*

*This is used as a reference point to develop various other reforms, and when you develop other reforms, then you bring in people like DFID (Department for International Development) and the World Bank, and UNDP (United Nations Development Program), and others, who then create projects out of those suggestions and reforms.*

SCHALKWYK: And how aware is the current government, the newly elected government, of this report?

HUSSAIN: *I have a meeting with the Deputy Leader of the House, Mrs. Sajeda Chowdhury, and I'm seeking a meeting with the Prime Minister to present this to her as a part of one of my stories—success stories while I was in the government. And this should be taking place in a week or two. This government is hardly a month old, so, I mean, I don't want to jump the gun, as it were, because they have far too many priorities, and every hour and every minute of the day there is a new priority coming up, as you are aware—well aware from what's been happening in Dhaka in the last 48 hours.*

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*So, I will seek an appointment, and try to give that same presentation that I had given to members of the Cabinet earlier, and I will try to make the same presentation to members of the Cabinet this time around, so that everybody is on the same wavelength, and the bureaucracy cannot tell the political government that this is what ought to be done, and this is what ought not to be done, because everybody knows what needs to be done.*

SCHALKWYK: Do you think there's space in the report for particular ministries or particular secretaries to carry out reforms, or does it need a centralized reform agenda or centralized reform body?

HUSSAIN: *Secretaries in the government will carry out reforms if it is done—if it is an order issued from the Prime Minister's Office. That is why the basis of all these reforms would be the creation of an Administrative Services Performance Improvement Division in the Prime Minister's Office. Right now, what is happening is reforms are being carried out based on what the file says, which one seems most palatable under the circumstances. This should stop, this should go. You cannot run such an important set of reforms on the basis of normal file work in the government, and that's it.*

*You need to have a special committee and a special body who will look at the reform package and create a sequence of activities. Each sequence will be then divided into phases, and each phase will be implemented, and the sequence will be completed accordingly.*

SCHALKWYK: All right. Is there anything you'd like to add before we finish the interview?

HUSSAIN: *Yes, when I hope to meet the people in power in the government very soon. When I meet them, this is what I will tell them; that what you need to do now is to have one unit as the head. You have the body in position, but you do not have a head. And you need to have this Administrative Services Performance Improvement Division which will control all the ministries, which will direct all ministries, and advise all ministries on what should be done, and how the report ought to be implemented.*

*And each step of the way, the report will—the division will report to the Prime Minister, because it is part of the her office. And thereby, because the big stick in the Prime Minister's Office will be watching over this report, all ministries and all secretaries will jolly well make sure that this is one project which gets done.*

SCHALKWYK: But you think it needs to have the Prime Minister's Office—the Prime Minister supporting it?

HUSSAIN: *That's the most crucial and vital issue.*

SCHALKWYK: Okay, thank you very much for your time, I appreciate it.

HUSSAIN: *My pleasure, sir. Thank you.*