

"The civil servants are the servants of the state, not of any political party or group."

Dr Mohammad Mohabbat Khan talks to Amitava Kar about the importance of a professional, efficient civil service.



There seems to be a negative idea about bureaucracy among the public. What is the role of civil service in a democracy?

The role of the civil service is basically to implement policies and programmes and maintain law and order. Sometimes senior civil servants advise politicians on policy options. People have a negative image of the civil service because of many reasons. One, the system we inherited from the British has remained more or less the same for the last 250 years with minor adjustments here and there. On the other hand, people's expectations in a sovereign country have skyrocketed. There is a mismatch between the attitude, ability of the civil servants and the expectations of the people at large.

Why hasn't it changed over the years?

Both during the Pakistan era and after independence, all the major reform efforts were deliberately blocked by top ranking civil servants. The Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP) became an institution by itself. It had its own privileges and interests to protect. After our independence, Bangabandhu appointed Professor Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury to head a high powered committee that came up with some smart recommendations. Professor Chowdhury even recommended the replacement of the elite system which was at the root of this resistance to change. But his major recommendations were never implemented. Politicians depend too much on civil servants for policy execution and policy advice. Civil servants are permanent officials of the government. Politicians come to power for a limited period of time. And their portfolios are occasionally changed. So they have little time to gather expertise in a subject and they are also busy with their political agenda.

What about recruitment? Does it need to be modernised?

About 55 percent of the civil servants are recruited on the basis of various kinds of quotas. But quota and quality never go together. My research quite convincingly proves that there is no way you can retain quotas for an indefinite period of time.

I think that there should be at least two more PSCs (Public Service Commission) —one for recruiting engineers and doctors and another for recruiting teachers, not only for government colleges but also for public universities. The third PSC would be general.

What can we learn from other countries?

In Singapore, if thirty people are recruited, the government will be monitoring their performance for at least five years. Based on their performance in the entrance exam, training and in the job, a maximum of five persons will be selected and sent to top universities of the world for training and higher education. Upon return, they will work for two or three more years before being sent to the private sector for another four to five years. By the time a civil servant will have gone through this process, he or she becomes a permanent secretary while his or her batch mate may not have become even a deputy secretary.

In European countries, you go as far as the mid level through the normal promotion channel, and then it's an open competition. You have to compete with the private sector, and NGOs. If you do well, you will be given a contract for three to five years, and you will be given market rate remunerations. But if you do not do well, you will be kicked out. It is totally performance-based.

Is the role of the Public Service Commission (PSC) up-to-date?

The PSC has brought about some reforms. But if you start appointing partisan people as the chairperson and members of the PSC, nothing much will improve. They will always be susceptible to pressure. You may think you are getting some benefit but in the long run

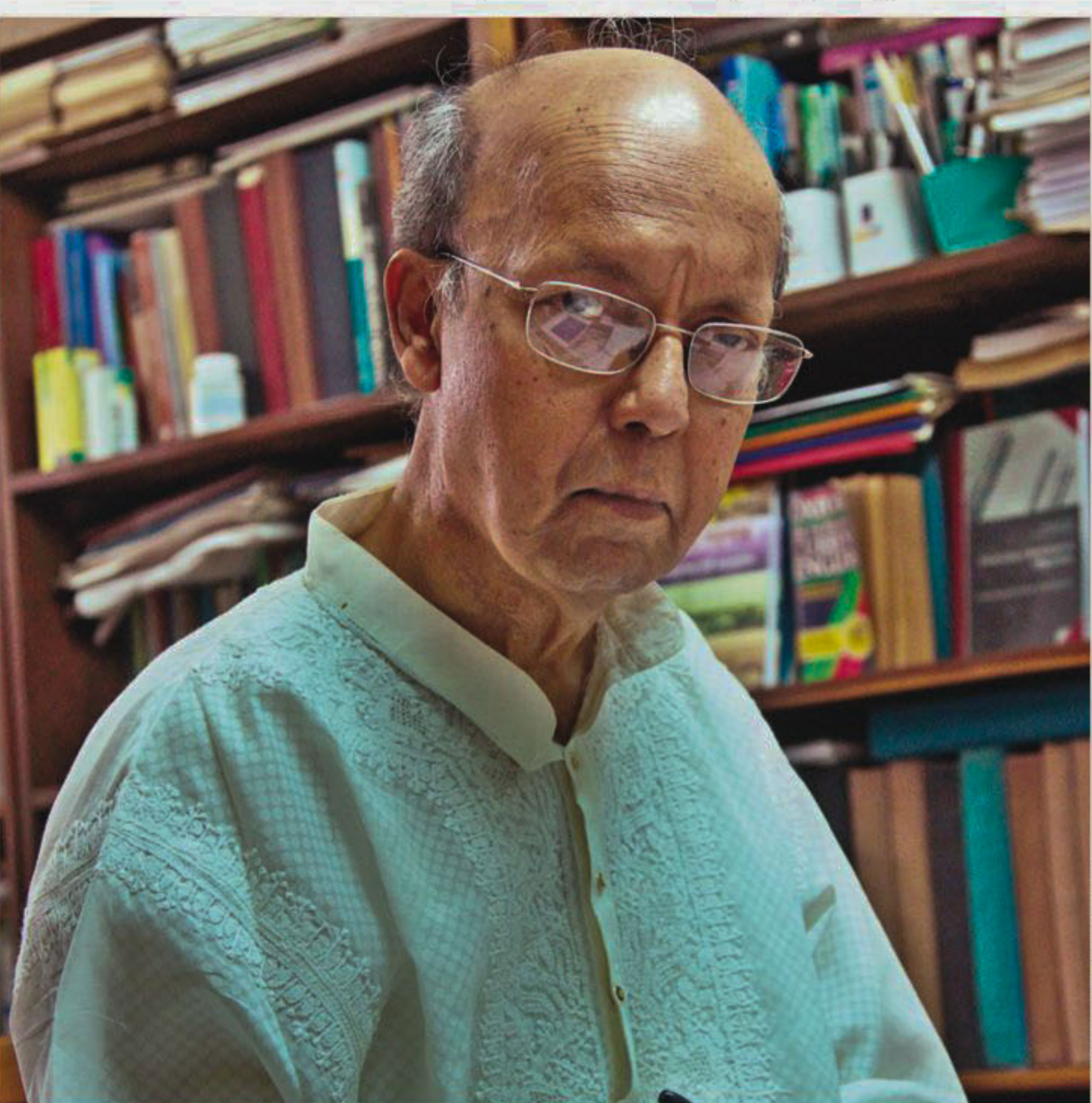


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

you are basically destroying the moral fabric of the public service. Corruption will be encouraged.

What constitutional safeguards does the state have in place for enabling civil servants to do their jobs free from political pressure?

The constitution provides very clearly that the civil servants are the servants of the state, not of any political party or group. It is extremely difficult to sack a civil servant unless he or she has committed gross irregularities. The government can retire you after 25 years. There are legal provisions for that. On the

other hand, you can go to the administrative tribunal or court to seek justice. I know some brilliant and brave officers at the district level who are taking tough actions. If you want to do your job the way you are supposed to, nobody can harm you.

But sometimes, a lot of them are made OSDs as a punishment. We also see mass promotion at the top level.

This is undesirable. Why are you making them OSDs? If there are specific charges against them, you try them. Making OSDs has very bad consequences for the country's finances. You are paying them salaries and

benefits. Promotion should be based on merit and performance. Why do you have to promote everyone to the ranks of joint secretaries, additional secretaries and secretaries? Not only are there no posts, they are performing the same jobs.

Public universities have the same problem. It is 100 percent certain that once you start as a lecturer you will retire as a professor whether you deserve it or not.

If universities are not producing qualified graduates, how much can the PSC do to produce efficient officers?

In many schools, teachers are absent; they are busy at the coaching centres. At the public universities, there are teachers who do not teach; they are busy doing 'consultancy' which I call 'insultancy'. Some teachers manipulate the grades of students on political and ideological lines. Dhaka University is not even among the top 5000 universities of the world. But then again, why should it be? What kind of research has it done? How many internationally renowned professors are there in the faculty?

While designing training programmes for officers, are Training Needs Assessment (TNA) properly done?

I have seen that most of the training programmes in many institutions are of little use to the civil servants. Not only do you have to upgrade your curriculum, you have to follow it up. Monitoring and evaluation is very important. Most of the civil servants do not like to go for local training but they are highly interested in foreign training. In some training sessions for senior officials, I found them sleeping or talking among themselves while I was lecturing.

Long time ago, I suggested the creation of a training cadre. This has not been done.

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A requiem for football



CLEAR AS MUD

WHEN thousands of Bangladesh fans at the Mirpur National Stadium were shouting mauka mauka and making fun of the beleaguered Indian cricket team to celebrate Bangladesh's historic ODI victory against its fancied neighbours, the country's football bosses had rather quietly made a decision that would literally change the face of Bangladesh football. Guinea born footballer Ismael Bangoura, Nigerian forward Kingsley Chigozie and Ghanaian defender Samad Yussif are going to be the first few sportsmen to be given Bangladesh citizenship so that they can play for the national side. The country had previously bestowed nationality to sportspersons; US professional boxer Muhammad Ali is a case in point. But Ali and some other famous foreigners were given honorary citizenship, which is markedly different from what the African trio will get.

Football, however, is no stranger to such a custom. Many European countries regularly give citizenship to foreigners who play well in the local league. The Bangladesh football team is in dire need of a good striker who will be able to find the net, preferably more than once in a match. The lack of a good striker has been felt on many an occasion, and Bangoura and Chigozie, who have played in the national league for more than five seasons, fit the bill well. If everything goes on as planned, Bangoura will be seen in Bangladesh's next match against Australia.

Gone are the days when Babul, Abul and Aslam used to entertain the capacity crowd at the national stadium. The rivalry between

Mohammedan and Abahani drew hundreds and thousands of fans across the country and around the globe too, where the Bangladeshi diasporas live. In fact, throughout the eighties, the Bangladesh team were at par with Southeast Asian giants like Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Bangladesh's presence in the Merdeka Cup used to carry an added charm to the Asia's

The game itself now attracts a motley crowd of a few hundreds and that too only in the high voltage matches. Even though the Bangladesh Premier League went professional in 2006, it has become a skeleton of its amateur self, failing to generate the enthusiasm that football used to boast even in the early nineties. Cricket's meteoric rise in the country is inversely

has paled football's all previous achievements.

There is however no denying that in Bangladesh, football, as a game, is much more popular than cricket. We can see its manifestation during the Fifa World Cup, when fans decorate even buildings with the flags of their favourite teams. But unlike cricket, football has never been able to translate this fan following into something concrete. Saving football demands a concentrated plan and that too should be the part of a long term strategy. Nationwide inter-school football tournaments should be held on a regular basis, age group divisional leagues can also be introduced. The thrust needs to be on the creation of under-14, 16, 19 and 21 sides in all districts and at the national level. It is time that Bangladesh set up a football academy for teenagers which will hire world renowned coaches. Bangladesh should hold two international tournaments that will be participated by Asian national side and a championship where major Asian and African nations will send their U-19 teams. It is indeed interesting to see that football, under the leadership of Kazi Salahuddin has gone through a mini renaissance of sort. But Bangladesh football still has a long way to go. Bangladesh needs to work on building its own footballing infrastructure, something that used to exist in the early eighties. It does not merely mean building new stadiums, which the country already has. We have to work on attracting the younger generation into the local football scene. Giving citizenship to the three African players can help Bangladesh play well against teams like Kazakhstan and Australia, but it is a remedy meant to work only in the very short run.



PHOTO: STAR

oldest tournament. Aslam's famous head, that brought Bangladesh the President's Gold Cup in Dhaka, now belongs to the memory of a forlorn past, so is Kaiser Hamid's goal against the Maldives, a match that had witnessed the island nation being trounced by Bangladesh 8-0. The Maldives is now a formidable force in South Asian football, having lately beaten Bangladesh in an international match.

proportional to the glory of local football. While the latter had a competitive advantage, cricket concentrated more on spreading the game to different age groups, an area where football lagged behind. It has some other advantages over cricket, which follows a set of complicated rules and demand a couple of special gears. But cricket's success in gaining the test status, along with its entrance into the ivy league of the game

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QUOTABLE Quote

There's a certain element in this country that has a privilege of being treated like human beings and the rest of us are not treated like human beings, period. And that needs to be discussed.



JESSE WILLIAMS

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 Chunnel city
 - 7 Headphones site
 - 11 Mystery writer
 - 12 Svelte
 - 13 Added (up)
 - 14 Except for
 - 15 Ship staffs
 - 16 FCC's concern
 - 17 On this spot
 - 18 Sex
 - 19 -- avis
 - 21 Taxing org.
 - 22 Kingpin
 - 25 Darling of baseball
 - 26 Colony members
 - 27 Monet or Manet
 - 29 Rages
 - 33 Team leader
 - 34 McCain's running mate
 - 35 Concerning
 - 36 Quarterback Dan
 - 37 Commotion
 - 38 Film set on
 - 39 Stock exchange?
- DOWN
- 1 Vacation spot
 - 1 Collar
 - 2 Love, to Luigi
 - 3 In a while
 - 4 1920 Olympics setting
 - 5 Midmonth day
 - 6 Down
 - 7 German steel city
 - 8 Lamp rubber
 - 9 European resort
 - 10 Cheap campaign tactics
 - 16 Intended
 - 18 Endowment
 - 20 Make ashamed
 - 22 Raptor's home
 - 23 Setting of 22-Down
 - 24 To the extent that
 - 25 Bigot's problem
 - 28 Bakery workers
 - 30 O'Connor's successor
 - 31 Kuwait coin
 - 32 Derivative sound
 - 34 Make lots
 - 36 Spoil

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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A	U	R	A	L	A	G	I	L	E
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

