

SIPG of NSU & SANPA holds a Webinar on "Dr. Akbar Ali Khan: Contribution to Bangladesh State and Society"

A webinar on "Dr. Akbar Ali Khan: Contribution to Bangladesh State and Society" was organized by the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG) and South Asian Network for Public Administration (SANPA) on 3 October 2022 at NSU.

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan was an influential academic, researcher, active and objective public intellectual and renowned bureaucrat- reaching the position of Cabinet Secretary in Bangladesh. He successfully combined multiple roles in his career- academia, research, and national and international bureaucracies. He died on 8 September 2022. His demise is a great loss for the nation. This webinar was organized to commemorate and discuss his contribution to Bangladesh state and society.

The distinguished panelists were; Mr. Abdul Mueeed Chowdhury, Former Advisor, Caretaker Government; Md. Aminul Islam Bhuiyan, Former Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Finance Division, Government of Bangladesh; Dr. Mohammad Tareque, Director, Bangladesh Institute of Governance & Management (BIGM) & Former Finance Secretary, GoB, and Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD). The moderator was Professor Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, Advisor, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), NSU. Academics, researchers, practitioners, civil servants, journalists, and students from both Bangladesh and abroad participated in the webinar.



Abdul Mueeed Chowdhury, Former Advisor, Caretaker Government, stated that Dr. Khan was his classmate in the History department of Dhaka University and from his student days he was studious and indicated his thirst for knowledge from then as his room was always littered with books. He was a quintessential bureaucrat as a civil servant but used to take a stand on issues in the greater interest of the state and governance. Possibly he will be remembered more for his contribution to the state and society after his retirement from service.

Md. Aminul Islam Bhuiyan, Former Secretary, ERD and a junior colleague of Dr. Akbar Ali Khan reminisces how Dr. Khan contributed to the consciousness of Bangladesh Statehood through his seminal work -the book- Discovery of Bangladesh. During his service life, he was involved in truly groundbreaking research work which put a spotlight on the lacunae of Public Sector Management. As a case in point he remarked as a Member of Directing Staff of Bangladesh Public Administration Centre, he showed the existing Performance Appraisal system of Civil Service was inadequate to judge the capability and performance of civil servants. Moreover, Dr. Khan later delved into issues of lacking governance and bureaucracy through his books – Friendly Fires, Humpty Dumpty Disorders, and Gresham's Law Syndrome and Beyond: An Analysis of the Bangladesh Bureaucracy. Mr. Bhuiyan remarked that Dr. Akbar Ali was truly a social philosopher as his interest in knowledge ranged across many disciplines and will be remembered for his writings on various issues ranging from Rabindranath to Governance.

Dr. Mohammad Tareque, Director, BIGM, and former Finance Secretary remembered how he was mentored by Dr. Khan as a junior colleague and how Dr. Khan at times promoted and opened avenues for junior colleagues by taking bold decisions and thinking outside the box. He remarked that Dr. Khan's writings were founded on evidence and through analysis. He was a key player in setting up the Institute of Governance & Management and will always be an inspiration not only for civil servants but also for citizens for speaking the truth.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, CPD, highlighted the achievements of Dr. Khan as a freedom fighter, civil servant, writer, and economic thinker. He remarked that Dr. Khan was also a development fighter and a policy shaper whose contributions and stand on ethical issues should inspire present and future civil servants. While remaining within the conventional economic thinking he was also critically constructive. He lamented that although his bold decision on many issues, like for example resigning from the Caretaker Government in many ways contributed to the return to democracy in Bangladesh, in that respect, the State should have remembered him.



During the open discussions, Mr. M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Former Cabinet Secretary, Government of Bangladesh pointed out that contrary to the popular belief that bureaucrats do not need to be scholars, Dr. Akbar Ali Khan proved that scholar-bureaucrats are essential and as such he will remain as a model for public servants.

Former Additional Secretary Aftab Uddin Ahmed said, "Many senior officers used to be angry with us. But Akbar Ali Khan never spoke loudly. If something needed to be corrected, he would do it himself. He is the symbol of our inspiration.

Dr. Habib Zafarullah, Founding Chair, SANPA said that he is the pioneer of regulatory governance in Bangladesh. His resignation from the Caretaker government was a brave step. His post-retirement years were productive as he wrote eloquently. He is an epitome of a perfect 'pracademic'.

The webinar started with a video presentation on SIPG and concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, Secretary General, SANPA, and Deputy Secretary, Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning, GoB.