Dhaka, Thursday, January 5, 1995

## How Crime-prone We are

A murder in every three and a half hours, a dacoity almost with the same frequency and a mugging in every two hours and 15 minutes. So a story goes, cataloguing the crime rates. No one could be blamed if he or she thought it to be a story from the other side of the Atlantic. Washington D.C. and New York share the infamous record of having the highest crime rate in the world. Countrywise, therefore, a serious crime in every two or three hours is quite an alarming rate. Shockingly enough, the crime rates give a true picture of how Bangladesh fared crime-wise in 1994.

Over just a year serious crimes like dacoity.. murder and mugging have registered two to four -fold rise. Socio-political stability has a lot to do with the rise in crime incidents. There is no sign that 1995 will bring that stability and hence there is every likelihood of this year's crimes

overtaking the past year's tally.

In a situation like this how is the administration bracing itself to meet the challenges of the anti-social forces? Overly preoccupied with politics no government can fully concentrate on social justice and the law and order situation. This has happened last year and signs are clear the same will be the case this year also. If the rate of crimes goes up further, one wonders if the place will be livable at all.

Political bankruptcy is mainly to blame for this indifference to the social order. A political consensus is urgently needed to deal with the threat But in our present political situation such a consensus is hardly to come about. Should we then submit to the irrational muscle power? Perhaps not. There are ways to get out of this social mess. Strong social movements and bodies can be a right answer to the problem.

## Close-to-life Films

Information Minister Shamsul Islam has obviously opted to play safe in talking about our nation's exertions in the film medium. He has preferred to play for the umpteenth time the old old record about the need of making close-to-life jibon-ghonishtho - films and the government's pledge to support this was repeated in toto to boot. Mr Islam is known as having general interest in various aspects of culture and is as such expected to possess well-formed ideas about what passes for films in our country. He knows only too well that this particular group, the film producers and distributors and others having their fingers in the pie, are not going to heed any dharmer kahini.

Successive governments have co-operated even as accomplices and abettors in the more than criminal operations mounted perennially on our culture and arts through celluloid. book at the costumes and the setting, the subject matter and the period, the mainstream Bangladeshi film is something very truly out of this world. While down to the village bazars there is a plethora of bluefilm parlours to whet the thirst for erotica in a repressed-sex society, a much wider clientele is fed on visual narcotics through the regular and above-board cinema houses, thanks to the multifaceted collaboration of the government.

This is stranger than a hundred entries in the Ripley book that you can buy everything produced everywhere in the world through our fast conversion to the market economy, films continue to be protected wholly not through a tariff wall but by outright banning of foreign films. And the films that trickle down through the wage-earner's hole are all sex-and-violence killers of culture. The ban and the wage-earner's filth combine to cook if the worst anti-people poison ever concocted in all history. How can Mr Islam hope to have jibonghonishtho films ever in Bangladesh without ever doing away with both? He doesn't hope really. He only repeats the old official chant.

### The Jinxed Box

At home BTV is a much maligned butt of derision if not jeer. Across the border it is, however, the name of a rather popular daily show in the Bangali-speaking zones of India. One can readily get at the catch. BTV is not only Bangladesh Television, it is, unlike Doordarshan, Bangla Television or Bangali TV. Next, it shows rather generously canned western material, specially exciting serials, which one cannot have on the Indian TV.

No, it is not that BTV is scoring without having any real merit. Although it has recently taken a sorry plunge, the BTV plays, particularly the serial ones have been attracting vast audiences ever since the commissioning of its studios at the fagend of '64. Good or bad in content and social or artistic significance, BTV always had an edge as far as presentation was concerned. The Dhaka show's were much more dynamic than the Calcutta programmes — sedate and uninteresting and a little to schoolmasterish.

The recent fall in the BTV's programme quality comes in tandem with the phenomenal spread of the dish antenna — the two threatening to wean away for good the nationwide audience so long tied down to the national TV. Although belatedly, BTV has reacted to this development positively and is introducing not only new and more interesting items but effecting a change in the overall presentation of programmes making these still more lively. Already the special shows on Rabindrasangeet and Adhunik gaan are showing much innovation and all round touch of talent. Specially in the use of the camera, costumes, colour and movement. We are certain, given the right quantum of artistic and intellectual freedom, our talents at the back and in front of the camera have the capacity in them to beat all challenges to show quality and popularity.

But when that freedom will be here, that's a million-dollar question. None too soon, for sure. And contributor number one to BTV's growing unpopularity is the predominance of dry, almost dead, chunks of unabashedly overt programmes of political propaganda with no pretensions to show quality whatsoever. How can a fettered BTV fight the onset of a whole world of free TV programmes?

#### Free and Fair Election ARLIER | pleaded that since money is going to rule, at the time of the election, it cannot be free and therefore not fair, in spite of the best of caretaker

The struggle for a free and fair election is no doubt the struggle for a democratic society. However, if in the process, the civil society is lost - we are doomed for good.

pendent Election Commission and whatever legal safeguards No. it cannot be since poverty are adopted between now and is not shared by all.

Democracy, like charity the next election season in must begin at home. Our multiple standards within the And, that money will rule household is the beginning of because of poverty. It is true the breakdown of the freedom that we have been poor in the and fairness for which the past, but there were elections when money could not pull it streets are full of demonstraout in favour of those who were tions as well as injured political leaders (thank God! by rubmoneyed. Remember 1954 or ber bullets only). We practically 1971: but those elections inshackle our women in chains. volved vital questions of our basic rights to live in a country force the daughters to give up their education and put chains of extreme inequalities. Ultiaround them through marriage mately, elections did not reat an early age. The mother solve the issue: we fought and secured our independent never gets the largest piece of the fish even though being Now in this highly homoge-

pregnant she needs it most. We are most undemocratic in our attitudes within households. We have no qualms about beating up our maids and servants. If the father is the autocrat within the household the boss would tend to be the same in the office. The government and the politics of the country cannot be different either.

#### Inequalities

Out in the streets, the inequalities are so obvious. Taxes on the cars have been lowered so that fortunate few can afford them, streets are cleared of rickshaws so that cars can move faster, while the number of buses remain few as usual. Please observe the small buses plying between Gulistan and Mirpur - their

cetlings are so low that one cannot stand straight - you have to crouch all the while, to and from office or work, six days a week. I do not know if political leaders are aware of the fact that there are many who cannot afford even the bus fares; they walk every working day from Mirpur to Motifheel to earn their living. They reach their work place in spite of hartals. They need work. They have got to earn a living and

hartals tend to deny them

other countries experiencing rapid economic growth. Unless we can ensure 900 working shifts per annum, manufactur ing would not be competitive in spite of low wage rates.

These are significant consideration of national priority. Unfortunately, certain self-interests are working against the national interests. On the other hand, if there is popular support in favour of hartals, then let there be no coercion

## WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

their daily bread.

The gross inequalities in our society cannot be removed overnight. Neither it can be done through politics alone First and foremost, what is required for equity and democracy is sustained economic growth for at least the next two decades at eight to 10 per cent per annum. And, this has to come largely through foreign investment and export manufacturing. But these two should be ruled out if hartals and stoppage of work become a routine affair.

The number of working days within a year Bangladesh is connted to be 250 only against 300 in all

and let us see how many shops and factories remain closed Hartals mean rickshaw-pullers must go hungry, since there is no demand for their services even if they are allowed to ply. No body has any right to shut down the national economy. not even the government; unfortunately it is not a criminal offence though consequences of hartals tend to be adverse

gave the command on 7th March and the entire nation followed. It was sportaneous. If the feelings of the people are the same in favour of care: taker government,- the way

for the economy of the nation.

Recall 1971, Bangabandhu only

opposition wants it - then the inevitable would follow. There is no need to jolt the national economy whose prospects look pretty bright at this point in time.

The opposition is legitimately' concerned that following the infamous Magura incident, the party in power may try to perpetuate its reign through 'unfair' means at the time of the election in 1996 Yet, it must not lead to any situation which might adversely affect the national economy Simply nothing can be of greater importance than economie growth. Let us not ruin our chances at this critical

#### Beyond politics

point in time. We must catch

up with the rest of Asia in our

struggle for economic emanci-

Beyond politics of the day and regardless of the form of tovernment, we have to establish a civil society where the behaviour of citizens and conduct of their everyday business reflect a profound inter-personal concern as well as a deep respect for the rights of others. This is absolutely fun-

Because of hartals, basically the modes of political protests being practised today, the scope of the civil society is getting restricted everyday. If the doctor, living in Lalmatia,

fails to attend to his patient at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on a hartaf day and as a result, the patient dies, it would not only amount to the death of an individual; with it, the civil society would also degenerate into anarchy - moving away from the common definition of civilized modes of be-

When a car is burning, as an aftermath of a political outcry, please remember that CNN will telecast, BBC will also do the same and the picture will appear in several leading dailies all over the world. We have nothing to gain and everything to lose in the present day world of instant communication. To an outsider it would appear that it is not only a car, but perhaps the whole country 'is burning since the nation is one of the poorest in the

The struggle for a free and fair election is no doubt the struggle for a democratic society. However, if in the process, the civil society is lost we are doomed for good. The sphere of autonomous institution, protected by rule of law, in which men and women may -conduct their everyday business freely and fairly, must be established first and the system cannot be interfered with at any cost.

We must ensure free and fair conduct of our day to day life and in the process, banish poverty, enjoy reasonable degree of security of life and standard of living. This is the global set within whose context the issue of free and fair election must secure its valid-

## Why More Divisions — Why Not Effective Local Government running the Gram Sharker.

by Faruq Mayeenuddin

districts are intensifying their movement for separate Divisions. government is learnit to have decided to create seven more Divisions thus dividing the country into twelve administrative units. Out of the proposed ones, Sylhet has already been upgraded as a Division. The proposed new Divisions, reportedly, will be Comilla, Bogra, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Rangpur and Noakhali.

government, a strong, inde-

neous, one language, one cul-

ture and overwhelmingly one

religion country, issues involv-

ing our basic rights to live will

hardly ever come up for deci-

sion through the ballot. It

could happen in an autocracy

but the resolution would come

through means other than the

ballot box. It can be safely con-

cluded that for the foreseeable

future, change of government

should be feasible through the

democratic means of election

where the role of money, sim-

ply because of our poverty

would continue to remain de-

will continue to live in a soci-

ety of unequals where neither

freedom will last nor fairness

prevail However can we be

poor but a democratic society?

The new Divisions will have total 65 officers and staff in cluding those of police admin istration. The Divisional Commissioner with the rank and status of a hunt Societary will have a private secretary an Additional and two Assii Commissioners in his office with it offer non-gazetted employees. On the other hand in the point range there will be an Asst) Police Super under the Deputy Inspector General with thirteen other members in the police administration. After implementation of the above proposals of Mushfious Committee for administrative reform such will be the structure at a Divisional headquar-

in the present setup the district is a self sufficient administrative unit with the Deputy Commissioner (DC) at its apex, who runs the administration with a three-pronged official entity. Firstly, the DC is the collector of all types of govt. revenue and receivables. as such his office is also called the Collectorate. Secondly, he holds the magistracy of the district, and thus he is the Magistrate. And thirdly, as he looks after and harmonizes all types of administrative and development work of the district, he is the Commissioner,

In a nutshell. DC is the supreme authority of a district in the matters of administration. It is, therefore, understood that in the existing functional obligation of the district administration, there are not much scope for any other machinery at the local level to be more associated with people in terms of development and other péople oriented

In the light of the above functions of the district administration, what may then be functions of a Divisional headquarter? It is clear, a Commissioner of a Division. that consists of some districts, controls and harmonizes the works of the DCs. But in addition to the administrative

power and functions of DG, the /Commissioner does not need to exercise any other functions on and over the former's. The offices of the Commissioners. however, are entrusted to work as the appellate office over the DC's office in the matters of any land dispute outside the civil court. To make the concept more clear it can be illustrated in the following manner: In case of some complicacy or dispute on land matters. AC (Land) office

decentralization should have been advocated for to have a people-oriented administration But how far this sort of centralization of administration by creating more Divisions would be effective - that guestion needs to

be reviewed again.

of this country more

We have so far witnessed a number of rehearsals of decen tralization during different

extend their support if the existing movement for Divisions could be turned into meaningful demand for establishing modern hospitals, vocational training institutes, dairy and poultry training centres, hatchery, local resources based industries etc. in the districts or thana headquarters. Not only people could be the direct beneficiaries of such projects but also the same could have bility at the local level which is away from the centre and this relieves the centre of many of the decisions that need to be taken and perhaps can best be taken at the local rather than at the national level." Our past experience on

training in political responsi-

formation of local government was not very pleasant. Let's take the instance of Gram Sharker (village government). the lowest unit of the local government. The units were

stitution. Such is the criterion of forming effective local government and from this it can be understood that mere formation of a unit of local government is not a sufficient condition of its purposes. .Therefore, it can be said that, where despite being a smaller unit the implementation of Gram Sharker did not work in the right way because of its su-

per-imposed formation, how a

Division can be useful to the

people in the existing struc-

i.e., it must acquire the right

to form Gram Sharker through

its activities. If it is distributed

like relief materials the same

will become a meaningless in-

So it is high time to reconsider the utility of the movement for more Divisions. The concerned quarters may even suggest to abolish the existing Divisions instead of creating more. Let us fix our target to build an effective local government system for ensuring mass participation in development activities for growth

and prosperity.

#### It cannot be ignored that there is no alternative to effective local government for ensuring participation of the people in the development process. But the participants should be given ample time to get prepared to be associated with the process, which was never allowed in the past.

at thana level is the first place to have a decision if not referred to the civil court, which, if cannot be mitigated there can be brought to the office of the Deputy Commissioner. If still the aggrieved parties are not satisfied with the decision given by the the DC, only then the matter can be placed to the office of the Divisional Commissioner.

This is the only exclusive and effective function of a Divisional headquarter outside the jurisdiction of a DC. But as per information gathered from the concerned quarter, such cases are so small in number that creation of more Divisions for discharging those is in no way so justifiable. Moreover, it cannot be taken as granted that the cases are always settled at the Divisional level. Still there might be grievances over the decision of the (Divisional) Commissioner, which then is to be referred to the Ministry of Land

It is worth mentioning here that the -(Divisional) Commissioner of Chittagong is assigned to run the judiciary as Session Judge of three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts. which, of course, is an exception and as such cannot be

generalised. From the above it is seen that under the present structure, a Divisional headquarter does not have anything more to do for changing the fate of the people except discharging a few cases of land dispute. In that case what argument the organisers of Division implementation movement are putting forward to impress the people is not clear. Whatever may be the arguments, those are not so convincing to any-

body with commonsense. 4 Considering the extent and nature of poverty and the ignored existence of the people

regimes. The District Governor system under Baksal programme of Bangabandhu. Gram Sharker (village government) concept of Ziaur Rahman and Upa Zila system of General Ershad - all such political efforts for decentralization have been this way or that, only examples of failure.

It cannot be ignored that there is no alternative to effective local government for ensuring participation of the people in the development process. But the participants should be given ample time to get prepared to be associated with the process, which was never allowed in the past. As such all the attempts have been turned into political stunt. Today, by people's movement or by government's political decision more Divisions can be created with some additional posts for bureaucracy, which may even bring some feeling of selfcomplacence among the people of the respective Divisions But one important point can be felt here that the poverty ridden people of the rural areas. whose participation is a direct factor to development, do not have representation in this movement, because a new Divisional headquarter in their district just cannot change their fate to the slightest xtent. Then, what this use (or misuse) of people's power is

meant for? One may well ask. Government can turn all the districts into Divisions treating it as a popular demand. But those who could have been the leaders to arouse consciousness among the people, could have united the people demanding effective measure for human development, infrastructural development for ensuring self emplayment which are the necessity of the hour. The conscious quarters would not hesitate to

been assets for our future gen-

Who can ignore that Haor development is much more an important issue than establishing a Divisional headquarter at Mymensingh. The seasonal famine that takes its toll each year in the north-western districts of Bangladesh, cannot be taken care of by a Divisional headquarter at Rangpur. Comilla needs more efforts and investment for development of 'co-operatives and cottage industries in that area than creating a Division there. Moreover, the districts of Comilla. Bogra. Mymensingh and Faridpur are adjacent to existing Divisional headquar-

It cannot be ignored that unless the people of the rural sector can be involved in productive activities growth cannot be ensured and an effective local government system is the only key to people's participation in economic activities. The more the units of local government be smaller, the greater will be people's participation. Moreover, a decentral-

ized policy decision is bound to be more responsive to local concerns and keep appropriate provisions for local conditions. Human development report 1990 of UNDP comments. "In most developing countries, however, political power is highly centralized. Few cities can govern themselves by electing mayors and city counells. A tradition of local government and a cadre of competent local officials have been slow to develop, and even where they exist they tend to function as extensions of central government." The Report of Task Forces on Bangladesh Development Strategies for the 1990s suggests, "In politics, such move towards decentral ization fulfils the objectives of

created in all the villages at a time by a government ordinance, which eventually, did not work. Albeit the system was introduced by Ziaur Rahman government, the main propounder of the concept was Dr. Muhammad Yunus. He himself commented on formation of Gram Sharker: "Before get ting approval to form Gram Sharker the specific village must prove that it possesses the capacity of forming and

## OPINION

## The West's Policy in Bosnia was Designed to Fail

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed 💉

in Princeton, NJ, USA

A review of the chronology of the recent events in the Balkans clearly demonstrates that Britain and France never really planned to confront the Serbs, their World War I and II allies: their plan has all along been to contain the Muslims. When Lord Owen unveiled, with much fanfare, the Vance-Owen plan to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina into autonomous ethnic provinces under a loose central government in April 1993, and the Serbs rejected it through a "referendum" that Owen himself called "sham," who ate his word? Not the

Serbs! Then the US formed a contact group with Russia, Britain, France and Germany, divided the country into Muslim-Croat and Serbian entities, and challenged the parties to accept the plan or face punishment. The Muslim-Croats accepted the plan and the Serbs called the West's bluff yet again. The net result of the Serb's rejection was not punishment, but the loosening of sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs' sponsors in Serbia, on a dubious promise of cooperation. So much for "negotiated settlement!" In reality, the West has repeatedly told the Bosnians: we will not defend you, we will not let vou defend vourselves!

The UN created "safe havens where unarmed Bosnians were going to be safe from Serbian shelling. Britain and France steadfastly refused to level the playing field by lifting the unfair arms embargo against the Bosnians. It will resuft in more killing and will endanger their ground forces. they said. The Serbs now oc cupy the "safe haven" of Bihac continue to destroy the lives and properties of thousands of innocent civilians, and have taken UN peacekeepers as hostages. What do the UN and the West do? They do not call in NATO air strikes, instead. with a straight face simply declare, "our policy in Bosnia has failed. When Boutros Boutros Ghali showed up for his much anticipated meeting with Karadzic at Sarajevo airport,

Karadzic forgot to show up! Undaunted, the plucky Secretary General threatened. without authority, to withdraw the UN forces from Bosnia. He need not bother. The British will make sure that their agent, Lt. Gen. Sir Michael Rose, will carry out London's mission in Bosnia until all

Muslims are strangled! US Defense Secretary William Perry asserts that the Serbian gains cannot be reversed. Where was Secretary Perry when the lightly armed Bosnian army liberated close toone hundred square miles of territory from the Serbs only a few weeks ago? There is no telling what they can do if the arms embargo is lifted.

The policy has failed because it was designed to fail! As Roger Cohen so eloquently points out ("NY Times Week in Review, November 27), the · British and the French officials privately express "their cons cern over the emergence of any sort of Muslim state in Europe." The violation of the "safe haven" and the massacre of innocent Muslim men, women and children do not conflict with that immoral imperative. The French have recently taken to expelling Muslim girls from French schools for wearing scarfs that guard their modesty. And the only dealings the British like with the Muslims are the billion dollars arms purchases by Saudi Arabia that keeps the British arms industry humming and thousands of Britons working.

The world's one billion Muslims are not a monolithic unit. The Egyptians, the Turks and the Saudis have very little in common with the Bangladeshis, the Malaysians and the Indonesians, except their religion If the British and the French feel justified in discriminating against the very secular Bosnjans simply because of their religion, perhaps the Muslims of the world should feel equally justified in returning the favour, and trade only with civilized nations that are not Muslim-haters!

#### Russian invasion of Chechnya

Yeltsin himself had signed a decree on December 8,1991 proclaiming the dissolution of the USSR. As a result all the republics of the former Soviet Union automatically got separated from each other and became independent.

We are surprised and shocked why the Russian President did not send troops to breakaway republics of Esthoria, Latvia and Lithuania and now why on the one hand he is shedding crocodile tears and on the other hand he is shedding the blood of thousands in Chechnya?

We strongly condemn the double-faced policy of Boris Yeltsin and demand immediate withdrawal of the Russian troops from Chechnya. We feel that after the end of the cold war the Russian invasion of Chechnya is a threat to world

peace. We would request the UN Security Council to impose economic sanctions against Russia for her aggression and protect the freedom and human rights of the people and help solve the Chechnyan issue

through discussions.

O H Kabir Dhaka

### Dhaka-Aricha road

Sir. Our highways are virtual death traps. So many people are losing their lives everyday due to frequent accidents on the roads. Out of all the roads, the Dhaka-Aricha highway may take pride in being the most notorious. Number of accidents is gradually increasing. There is no likelihood that it will decline in the near future.

it is felt that if a road-divider is constructed all along the highway upto Aricha, incidence of accidents will come

down sharply. At the moment the road-divider has been extended only a few miles beyond Mirpur, But this needs to be extended upto Aricha. Of course for this, the road may need to be widened. And widening the rood for this purpose is well justified. It may not be out of place to

mention here that accidents on Airport road has declined sharply after the construction of a road-divider there a few years ago. Hence, I appeal to concerned ministry to think about the matter seriously and do something in this regard. Saich Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment

## Resignation of Sir. The activities of our

cause of the nation for which they are paid for. Resignation of the opposition MPs enmasse is irregular, hence the point of acceptance of the same may be rejected. In this regard, it is perti-

are the least concerned for the

nent to point out that all those members had boycotted the Parliament sessions during the last nine months but surprisingly had continued drawing their salaries and other fringe benefits which aggregates to over Taka 2 crore. Over a Writ Petition, the hon'ble High Court had already termed the action as irregular and also ordered for recovery of the amount from the members in default. An appeal against this High Court verdict has already been filed with the Supreme Court. During the pendency of this appeal question of resignation cannot arise.

# opposition MPs

politicians, especially those who are in the opposition are very much distressing. These high dignitaries, as it appears.

Zaman Dhaka