

## ORGANIZED CRIME

### A Case of Concern for the Society

by Dr A T R Rahman

Organized crime in Bangladesh seems to be a complex problem with security, economic, educational, political and societal dimensions. It is a security issue because people sense insecurity for their life and property while criminal activities go largely unpunished and criminals and their leaders and protectors govern the society unofficially... It is a societal problem in the sense that society tends to condone and tolerate these activities and their supporters and leaders either get elected and or have linkages to those who are in ruling positions in society.

Coverage of this organized crime situation in Bangladesh. But there is a certain informed feeling that it exists and is growing, despite protestations by many political and social leaders. The Government is aware of the situation and the Prime Minister has declared stern and unbiased treatment of the terrorists, criminals and law breakers in accordance with law. A report in the press notes that the police arrested 20 terrorists in Dhaka against whom 200 cases are pending.

Bangladesh is not a product of this government or the previous government. It has been evolving since late sixties, with the rise of political unrest and the introduction of fire arms in the society in the early seventies. Since then, a variety of confluencing factors including militancy of various key groups, society repressive political regimes, rising unemployment have contributed to the current situation showing widespread presence of organized muscle power and criminals. Hence the responsibility of dealing with the situation has to rest with the society, including government, opposition parties, students, labour groups and any other relevant and powerful social groups.

Society. Since the political sector exercises more influence in the society, the primary responsibility for dealing with the issue will obviously lie with the political parties. Of course, the political parties may decide to take a partisan and short term view of the whole situation and let the society adjust to the realities of the situation which they have been doing for decades. The complacency with which our society has had adjusted its ways of life, individually, family and group wise with the deteriorating law and order situation is sad, but nonetheless reflects the subservience of our docile civil society to the rich and powerful. If the growth of organized crime is allowed to continue, not only will we fail in achieving development and justice in society, but our quality of life will further deteriorate.

#### Rising Sense of Insecurity

A growing sense of insecurity is slowly spreading among the population. The ineffectiveness of police in dealing with rising rate of violence is causing helplessness among people who are left to their own devices to deal with the situation. In addition to such rising violence, there are increasing evidence of sporadic extortion, systematic but illegal collection of protection money from business, commercial and trade activities, construction and building works and similar money spending and money generating activities. Many institutions and businesses, commercial and trade centres are affected by these violent and extortion activities which are confined not only to urban centres but to rural areas, especially in border villages.

#### Organized Crime — a Complex Issue

Organized crime in Bangladesh seems to be a complex problem with security, economic, educational, political and societal dimensions. It is a security issue because people sense insecurity for their life and property while criminal activities go largely unpunished and criminals and their leaders and protectors govern the society unofficially. It is an economic problem in the sense that not only there is less order, protection and predictability in organizing and carrying out business activities, but the economy has to bear the burden of supporting these organized criminal activities, providing living to unemployable persons with expertise in violence, terror and use of muscle power. It is an educational issue in that a rising number of students are not either interested or get appropriate environment and support for meaningful education, neglect education, and turn to non-educational activities, particularly student politics. It is also a student political issue as a significant section of those involved join cadre politics, receive training in the use of fire arms and muscle power and participate in criminal activities — threats, extortion, killing etc. It is a part of larger political issue as individual politicians appear to offer protection to these groups, many of them offer loyalty to specific political parties and individual leaders. Finally it is a societal problem in the sense that society tends to condone and tolerate these activities and their supporters and leaders either get elected and or have linkages to those who are in ruling positions in society.

#### Growing Signs of Organized Crime

While some would like to believe that these activities are sporadic work by uncoordinated individuals, many would argue that there are increasing evidences that crime, extortion and protection are being organized and these activities are carried out in an organized way, albeit many of these organizations may still be amorphous and localized. Press reports indicate that these organized criminal activities are integrally linked to student politics including their cadres, local political leaders, and motley group of unemployed youths, local ex-criminals, and touts. A recent report in the press claims that twenty terrorists with links to two political parties control most college campuses in Dhaka city — reserving some admissions to their choice, selecting contractors and collecting contribution from them, and also participating in controlling other markets in the city.

Similarly in the district of Jessore, there is recent report of extreme political forces with armed cadres involved in various violent crimes and illegal influence in union council elections. The recent ruthless killing of one union council chairman and one freedom fighter commander in Keraniganj within a period of two hours by the opposing parties, allegedly organized for years, has shocked the nation.

As much as one would like to think that the rising violence in our society is the work of stray individuals, their frequency, their penetration in different parts of the country, and their sustained capacity to persevere indicate their organized character. Nevertheless, there is certainly no clear picture of the pattern, scope and

organizing and maintaining political authority. It is a societal problem in the sense that society tends to condone and tolerate these activities and their supporters and leaders either get elected and or have linkages to those who are in ruling positions in society.

#### Organized Crime in Other Countries

This is not to say that there are not organized crimes in other societies. As a matter of fact, there are organized crimes in many developed countries including the United States (for example, Italian Mafia). But these crimes and the criminal groups are localized and they rarely involve the life and property of average inhabitants of the country. Even then, these organized groups are under constant surveillance of the police forces and the general people are also aware of the areas in which these groups operate. In our case, the organized criminal activities are not limited to specific areas, they are becoming quite pervasive. Again those involved in organized criminal activities in our country come from different groups in society, some are genuinely for employment considerations while others may have chosen it a way of life, while still others may have been the victims of circumstances and other forces. As organized criminal activities affect the life and property of ordinary people of our country, its arrest and timely solution should receive the attention of our policy makers, including the opposition political parties and student and labour leaders.

#### Need for a Practical Study

Once a consensus can be developed on the seriousness and the urgency of dealing with the rising organized criminal activities in Bangladesh, there will be no dearth of ideas and practices for implementation. Obviously the most likely immediate measures will be improved and unbiased law enforcement, effective policing,

Dealing with the evolving organized crime will have to be the responsibility of the whole

## An Exploitation of the Scientific Kind

by Mahmud Farooque

THE US or for that matter any advanced industrialized country needs Bangladesh needs them. Without an explanation, this must be the second most outrageous statement that I have made recently. The untested first must be my claim that our economic salvation lies in uncovering the comparative advantage of Jinjira (DS editorial, Nov 16 '97). In support of my hypothesis, I submit another gem from the history of scientific thought: Derek J. De Solla Price's 1962 book titled *Little Science, Big Science*.

Price set out to explore the transition of scientific activity from isolated, independent, curious and nonconformist tinkering to the mammoth state sponsored, multiple organization driven, expensive and expansive explorations. From his findings what is of interest to us is the growth and productivity of scientists as a nation's economy becomes more dependent upon the advances of scientific and technological capabilities.

making society free of unauthorized possession of fire arms, speedy prosecution of criminals through courts, a creative approach to absorb most of the alleged participants in organized criminal activities back into the society through gainful employment and above all creating confidence and credibility among people about the genuineness and sustainability of political leaders' efforts in dealing with the rising organized criminality in the country. However, as a part of concerted efforts to deal with the situation, it may be useful to undertake a quick study to understand the growth, activities, pattern of work and operation, intensity of systems and the scope, intensity of local and organized crime activities in Bangladesh. Based on such understanding, remedial measures, both short term and long range and a programme of action can be developed for implementation by relevant authorities.

The study may focus on listing the kinds of organized criminal activities, the processes these activities have evolved for contributions for cultural activities, transfer of technology, money for business activities, how they are organized and carried out, who benefits from these activities directly and indirectly, what are the linkages between the organizers and the participants of the crime and other critical power sources in the society that tolerate, protect and support these activities. Special focus should be given on a few intensive case studies in different situations and locations (e.g. educational institution, commercial centre, manufacturing complex, trading areas, smuggling centres) to capture various dimensions of organized criminal activities. Remedial actions including one-time measures such as training and employment of leaders and agents of organized crime may be developed through a participatory process involving members of all critical and relevant groups. If necessary, the proposed study may utilize the experience of how organized crime in being dealt with in other countries.

As it has affected individual and family life, we sometimes forget our priorities and best interests in our preoccupation with some immediate goals and activities. It seems our national leaders and their workers may be doing the same thing, underemphasising and sometimes overlooking the need for providing and maintaining political authority. We strongly hope that public interest will guide and inform our political and governing process and our decision makers will take effective corrective measures to deal with the rising organized crime situation in the country.

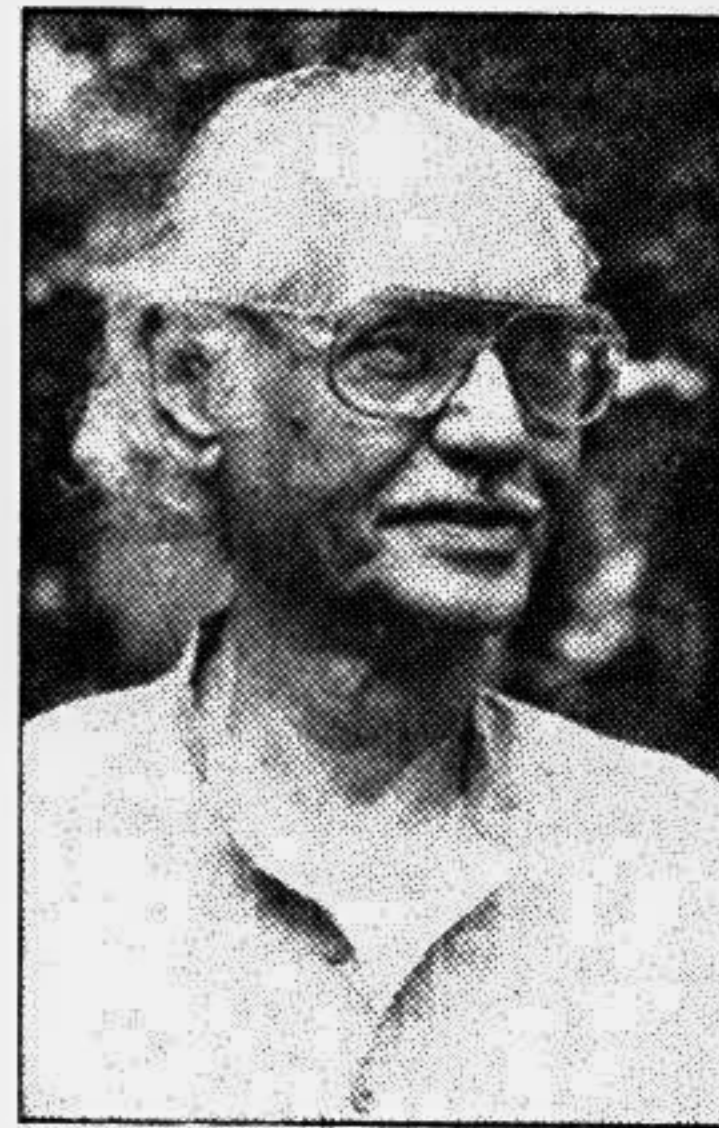
The author is a retired senior United Nations Officer and currently a Professor of Public Administration at the City University of New York.

## INTERVIEW

### "Life has taught me to be humble and forgiving"

Kabir Chowdhury is irresistible. Teacher, critic, translator and social worker this septuagenarian man of letters is one of the most resonant presences in our cultural domain. Elder brother of martyred playwright and academician Munir Chowdhury and celebrated stage performer Ferdousi Majumder, Mr. Chowdhury is one of the few 'alive' veterans whose experiences encompass all the critical phases of our history. An eloquent witness of time the elder Chowdhury has been an inspiring stay against confusion. Perhaps the single most contribution to the process of societal evolution of this man has been the unmistakable readiness conviction and consistency with which he has reminded and still reminds the nation of the founding principles and the generative impulses of Bangladesh. An avowed critic of the obscurantist, communal and divisive forces, Mr. Chowdhury has all along been a champion of peace, harmony and tolerance.

Endowed with delightfully deceptive mobility and involvement, Kabir Chowdhury turns 76 today. Following are the excerpts of the thoughts on the day, the month, and the country in general this young man of 76 shared with The Daily Star correspondent Chandra Shekhar Das.



The Daily Star (DS): What does ageing mean to you? Do you see it as an announcement of depletion of your resources, waning of your mental faculties and zest for life?

Kabir Chowdhury (KC): Well it means maturing with time. I am an optimist. Ageing does not despair me. I believe in what Browning wrote in Rabbi Ben Ezra, "Get old with me, the best is yet to be."

DS: You look remarkably fit for your age? What is the secret?

KC: Would you believe I am a veteran of several surgical operations? That's another story. But by and large some of my habits seemed to have served me well. I am an early riser and in the habit of doing some tree hand exercises every day. Besides, I am pretty close to being called a vegetarian.

DS: What worries you?

KC: Democratic culture has not made deep inroads into our consciousness — neither as an individual nor as a society. We are still inclined to think along the paternalistic line, hegemonic line, imposing one's will on the other. We are still intolerant about the view as opposition; we are inclined to think a person who doesn't subscribe to my view as our enemy. Demo-

cratic culture cannot flourish with this attitude, nor promote values of tolerance.

DS: What you think are the reasons?

KC: Wrong legacy. There was nothing one could associate with democracy in the pre-independence days. After independence there were some efforts to promote the democratic culture. But then it floundered on more than one rock. Killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a huge setback for the founding principles of the state. After that, during regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Ershad we had a kind of democratic government where democratic practice was missing. But then I am hopeful, albeit tardily though, democratic culture will develop.

My biggest source of worry is the resurgence of fundamentalism and threat it poses to secularism. I am anxious because not much is being done to resist the fundamentalist forces.

DS: Is not that an open invitation to civil war?

KC: Well, that is a valid but not a realistic question. Because I do not think the fundamentalist forces enjoy that kind of mass support.

DS: We are closing in on Ekushey February. It has been forty six years since people of this land made supreme sacrifice for the language. How practically relevant this commemorative day is today?

KC: It is true that Ekushey February has turned into a ritual. But then it is a life-giving ritual. It has assumed mythical proportion. It fills us with a sense of pride and achievement as a nation. I think the urges behind the language movement are specially relevant to these times. The urge behind the language movement was essentially democratic. A great sense of unity was at work. We need all those inspirations to achieve our target of developing the nation.

DS: What would be the one word of wisdom or advice you would like to pass on to the successive generations?

KC: Well that's difficult to answer. But seventy-five years of life have taught me that hostilities, feelings of arrogance and superiority do not only damage interpersonal relationships but also damage one's own self. One becomes twisted and smaller by nurturing hostility. I might be talking like a savant or scribe but I really believe that one should be humble, modest, forgiving and charitable.

DS: Thank you for your time.

DS: Well, it is a combination of factors. But as someone with long experience of teaching I can see where and how the teachers go wrong. Teachers are not driven by sense of idealism these days. Having said that I am alive to their defence that teachers are a part of the society and they are not isolated products. But to that I would say you

became a teacher because you wanted to be a teacher; nobody asked you to be a teacher. At least I would love to think like that.

DS: What you think should be the policy initiatives in the education sector?

KC: Well the accent has to be on primary education. We have to go for mass literacy. But then one cannot imagine de-emphasising higher education. Because in an ideal situation people with higher education are the ones who provide leadership. But I am not sure if the host of private universities are doing that. Higher education has become a commodity today.

DS: But then that is the world order...

KC: Well I am afraid I cannot deny that in this age of free market, but I am convinced state cannot totally abdicate its role at any level of education. I know this is a complex issue that involves a host of other aspects like democratic culture and practice but there is no doubt the matter has to be thoroughly examined by enlightened and patriotic people.

DS: You have been witness to the most tumultuous, sparkling and glorious days of our history. Compared to that these are hard times; devoid of challenge and inspiration. We are now embroiled in petty bickerings. Does it make living bitter, burdensome and boring?

KC: Things like that depress me. But I would not label them as a permanent source of gloom or despair. I think we are going through a dark phase. Also because the democratic culture has been there, we shall overcome. Signs are bright.

DS: What signs of brightness are there?

KC: There is acrimony, there is fight in the air. But there is an unmistakable positive note. I consider the recently concluded Hill Tracts accord as a very positive breakthrough. The main opposition is not doing democratic culture any favour by staying away from the parliament but I have feeling that more people within the opposition ranks are in favour of the parliamentary politics. That shows good sense is prevailing and loosely speaking we are on the right track.

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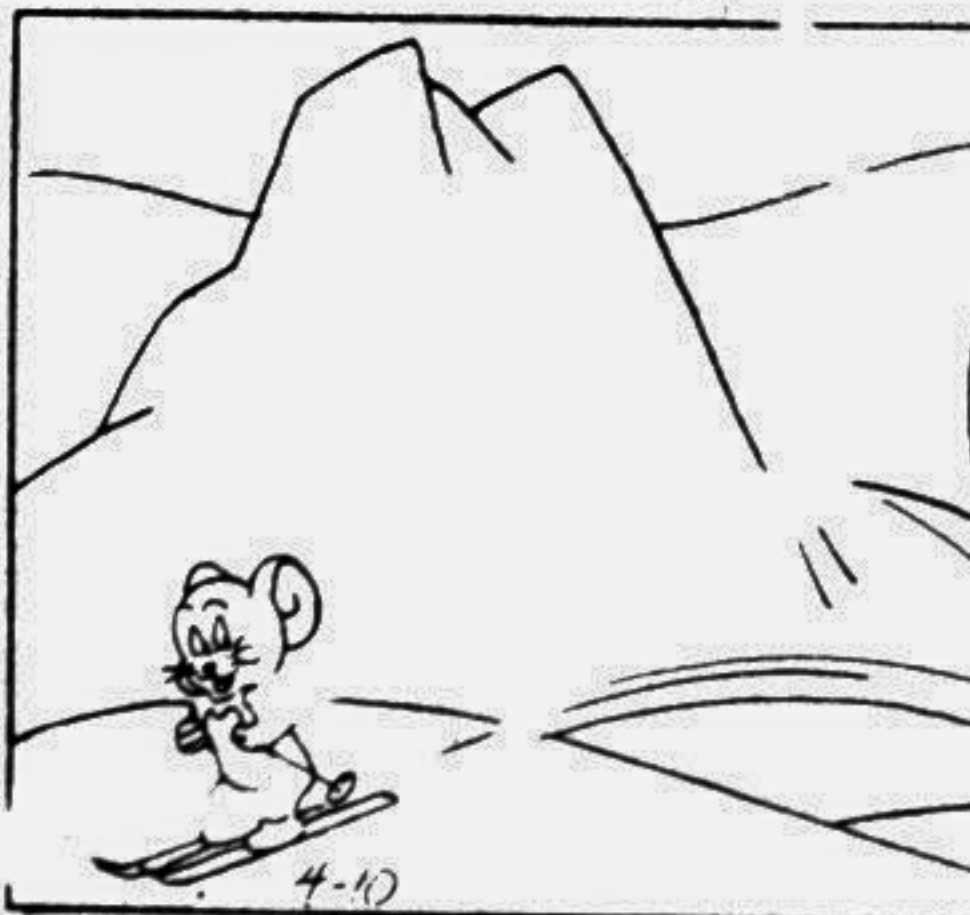
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DS: Thank you for your time.

## Garfield



### Tom and Jerry




## Why do you smoke cigarettes?

- BECAUSE -**
- Smoking quickens the process of death
  - Smoking causes lung cancer
  - Smoking causes chest and heart diseases
  - Smoking leaves one in rotten health in later life - coughing, wheezing and spluttering all season
  - Smoking makes one physically inactive
  - Smoking contributes in the creation of so many disorders in the human body, some of which are even transferred to the offspring
  - One puff of cigarette smoke contains fifteen billion particles of matter, some of which cause serious harm to human health
  - Nicotine in tobacco makes the blood vessels narrower thereby raises blood pressure which is a factor for causing heart-attack
  - Tobacco contains arsenic and benzopyrene which causes cancer
  - Smoking pollutes the environment and leaves adverse effect on the fellow non-smokers
- IF YOU DO NOT AGREE WITH EITHER OF THE ABOVE LISTED REASONS IN SUPPORT OF YOUR SMOKING HABIT, THEN PLEASE DO STOP SMOKING RIGHT NOW!**
- Composed and designed by: M. ZAHIDUL HAQUE, Associate Professor, Dept. of Agril. Extension, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Sher-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.