ORGANIZED CRIME

A Case of Concern for the Society by Dr A T R Rahman

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economic, educational, political and societal dimensions. It is a security issue

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Popular perception of ris-ing deterioration of law and order situation in the country has been growing for some years. Incidence of violence and lawlessness aided by unchecked use of firearms by various groups have been increasing. Frequent use of strikes and hartals and the liberal use of demonstrations and processions on public streets by numerous groups, large and small, to peruse their demands have made their contribution to the rising violent behaviour in the society. Violent crimes including murders, dacoity, robbery and theft are also on the rise. According to the Bangladesh Human Rights Council, there were 5709 violent crimes including murder. dacoity, campus violence and road accidents in 1997.

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 centers but to rural areas, specially in border villages. Newspaper accounts of these incidents in both urban and rural areas are a daily feature. This situation is breeding a sense of insecurity and helplessness among general people and encouraging indiscipline, rule of the muscle, and violence-prone elements and activities in the society. It also adversely affects production, distribution and service activities in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, raising the cost of business and generating uncer-

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 poforces 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

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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. Similarly the Home Minister is reported to express concern at the rising snatchery, stealing/burglary and chandabazi in the city where in only Ramna police station 37 cases were registered in the first six days of January 1998. The government It is a very difficult chalis considering to introduce lenge because the issue of vio-

ing level. Organized Crime — a Complex Issue

stringent punishment for some

violent crimes like murder.

rape and acid throwing.

Notwithstanding these initia-

tives, there are also reports of

enduring linkages of alleged

criminals and terrorists with

some political parties and the

police, particularly at the work-

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 ap propriate 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

tions in society. Organized Crime-growth and Current Status

to those who are in ruling posi-

As noted earlier, organized crime is probably in the formative stage in Bangladesh. If no suitable actions are taken now. the criminal activities and the criminals will become more systematized and institutionalized with greater resources and better equipment. At that stage it will be more difficult to resolve this problem than now. However, dealing with such a complex and difficult situation requires a deeper and full understanding of the problem and a certain degree of consensus by the key segments of society on the remedial measures. It must be recognized that the emerging

organized crime situation in

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 in 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.

lence and violent behaviour is

becoming a part of our mainstreams in the society. We are no longer a society which values human life over all other differences, prizes tolerance and respect for views and behaviour different than ours, practices peaceful and cooperative ways of dealing with our problems keeping national and public interest above all other considerations. Long gone are the days when killing of four students in Dhaka in police firing led to the wholesale downfall of the government. While mourning the past will not get us anywhere, it serves as a painful reminder of how we have come to this stage. Many a time we have introduced policies and actions with elements of violence and indiscipline and condoned them in order to achieve our political and social goals. This process created both the legitimacy and the gradual strengthening of the practice of violence and indisciplined behaviour and the development of organized groups in other key sectors who have developed close linkages and operating relationships with the political parties and their leaders and workers. While focused on our goals, we never paid enough attention to the process and methods. We never_realized sufficiently that use today have implications and life of their own which will bear consequences for which we have to pay in the future. Everything may be fair in love and war, but in normal social life means are as important as ends. The hallmarks of developed societies are an almost equal emphasis on the processes and methods as on the goals and missions.

Role of Political Leaders

Dealing with the evolving organized crime will have to be

the responsibility of the whole

linkages to those who are in ruling positions in society. 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 we will fail in achieving development and justice in society, but our quality of life will further deterio-

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 attacked solution should receive top pri- situation in the process of car

cluding 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 aclivities 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,

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. support systems and the scope, intensity and local of 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 list-

ing the kinds of organized crim-

inal activities, the processes these activities have evolved (contributions for cultural activities transformed to protection 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 happens in 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 main-

wining a stable law and order the processes, and methods, we are prity, of our policy, makers; in a onying a but retheir it immediate; struggle for acquiring 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 sit uation in the country.

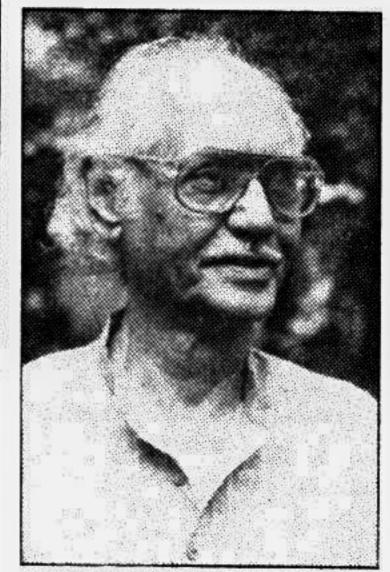
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INTERVIEW

"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. Aging does not despair me. I believe in what Browning wrote in Rabbi Ben Ezra, " Grow 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 experiences? That's another story. But by and large some of my habits seemed to have served me well. I am an early riser which the habit of doing some free 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.

tation 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: Is not that an open invi-

DS: We are closing in on Ekushey February. It has been forty six years since people o 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 mythic 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. Besides, the promises of Ekushey have remained largely unfulfilled in the education sector. Creativity is bound to be stifled if the medium of education is anything other than the mother tongue. I am not at all against English or any other foreign language. Rather I resent the manner in which English is being taught today. Education today is working as a hindrance in the fuller appreciation and understanding of our culture.

DS: Whom would you blame for the poor state of our educa-

KC: 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

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 host of other aspects like democratic culture and practice but there is no doubt the matter has to be thoroughly examined by enlight ened 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 though 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.

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 is 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 sadhu but I really believe that one should be humble. modest, forgiving and charita-

DS: Thank you for your

An Exploitation of the Scientific Kind

THE US or for that matter any advanced industria-I lised country needs Bangladesh as much as Bangladesh needs them. Without an explanation, this must be the second most outrageous statement that I have made recently. The uncontested first must be my claim that our economic salvation lies in uncovering the comparative advantage of Jinjira IDS 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 tin-

by Mahmud Farooque kering to the mammoth state amount of scientific contribu-

sponsored, multiple organisation 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 econ-

omy becomes more depended upon the advances of scientific

and technological capabilities. Measured in terms of number of scientists and the number of scientific papers, the growth in science follows an s-shape curve: there is a floor and a ceiling and a region of exponential growth in-between. Scientific productivity, on the other hand, follows economics of decreasing returns: more scientists are

needed to produce the same

by Jim Davis

tion. In terms of numbers, it takes about 10 years to double the number scientists, but 20 years to double the number of noteworthy scientists. Combination of the growth

rate of science and distribution of the scientific productivity leads to the frightening conclusion that "research expenditure increases as the fourth power of the number of good scientists." The propensity to allow science to grow at the same rate as the national economy thus becomes a limiting factor that forces the exponential growth pattern to approach its growth ceiling.

Now let us focus our attention on how much large high income countries such as the US, Japan, Germany, UK and France spend on research and development (R&D). By 1989 figures, the spending on R&D for these advanced countries are less than 3 per cent of their respective Gross National Product (GNP). Granted that the sheer size of these economies makes 3 per cent an incredibly large endowment for scientific activity. However our interest is more in the growth of these allocation as we expect to see the share of scientific allocation to grow at a faster rate than the growth of the national economy.

To our surprise we find that the allocation figures for R&D hovers around the 3 per cent mark irrespective of the rate of growth in GNP. It is here that the truth of the matter lay. How can an advanced industrial country sustain the growth of its scientific enterprise without paying an increasing rate of premium for it? In search of that answer we travel to a small, least developed country called Bangladesh.

If we are to only consider the case of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), the annual development spending per student is roughly 25,000 Taka (1989 University Grants Commission figures). Giving about five years for a student to graduate, we get a total cost of \$ 3,125 (1 US\$= 40 Taka) for every graduate engineer. Contrast this with the \$20,000 per year that it takes for a student to attend a premium engineering school in the

US. For the price of one engineering graduate in the US, it can get twenty-six engineering graduates from Bangladesh. The irony of it all is that

even the measly cost of \$3,125 per engineer is not borne by the US, but by a cash-starved economy like Bangladesh. It is perhaps important to point out that the migration of scientists and engineers from the least developed countries to

the industrially advanced coun-

try has been going on for a long

time. It is also important to

point out that this economics of

migration works only in the case of science and engineering That is because the language of science and engineering is uni-So here is my point for our policy makers. We have two categories of migration from Bangladesh: skilled and nonskilled. My personal intuition is that the greater benefits in terms of foreign exchange earnings come from the export of non-skilled labour. These are the people who maintain closer ties with their roots and are most likely to return home. As a nation, we spend close to nothing on the development of

these individuals but we spend a

considerable chunk of our edu-

cational allotment to train

people with high expertise. I am not saying that we should close down our public engineering schools and medical colleges. What I am saying is that our expenditure is better justified if we can find some means of retaining these highly skilled individuals in our own economy. Otherwise we should seriously consider whether we should use public funds to support the US economy at the expense of our own. On the other hand, we can also consider allocating some of the money that we now spend on educating scientists, engineers and doctors to improving the skill level of our labour exports to the Middle East and the South East. Since these are the people most likely to send their income home, why

earn more? The flip side of Price's original thesis is also equally interesting. The cost of scientific growth becomes a concern only after the rate of growth of the national economy begins to slow down.

not increase their ability to



BECAUSE -

O Smoking quicknes the process of death

Smoking causes lung cancer

O Smoking causes chest and heart diseases

O Smoking leaves one in rotten health in later life - coughing, wheezing and spluttering all season

O Smoking makes one physically inactive

the fellow non-smokers

O 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

O Nicotine in tobacco makes the blood vessels narrower thereby raises blood-pressure which is a factor for causing heart-attack

O Tobacco contains arsenic and benzopyrene which causes cancer O Smoking pollutes the environment and levaes adverse effect on

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!

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