

35-Years (1948-83) of Crime in Bangladesh : Socio-Economic Implications

By SALAHUDDIN AHMED

As far back as March 23, 1964 I wrote an article entitled "Fifteen Years' of Crime in East Pakistan (1948-62)" published in the Pakistan Observer, incorporated in a Book entitled "Studies in Juvenile Delinquency and Crime in East Pakistan" published by the College of Social Welfare & Research Centre, Dhaka in April, 1966.

These 15 years' crime figures were compiled from respective annual Police Administration reports. Thanks to the concerned authorities for these reports, allowing for certain inevitable time lag, these are still being published and students of Social Sciences, particularly those of Criminology, Sociology and Social Welfare have these statistics for their studies and research and for whatever conclusions they may like to draw from them.

Reproduced herewith from above references:

NUMBER of cases reported to Police between 1948 to 1962 in East Pakistan:

@ Year	No. of cases reported
1948	69,881
1949	67,731
1950	68,212
1951	63,827
1952	58,892
1953	59,678
1954	56,877
1955	58,678
1956	67,102
1957	74,257
1958	70,895
1959	74,355
1960	70,837
1961	59,991
1962	57,210

(From Studies in Juvenile Delinquency and Crime in East Pakistan by Salahuddin Ahmed)

* Former Defence Secretary, Government of Bangladesh.

Since 1947-48 the then East Pakistan's population of only 43 million, in 1983 reportedly stands at 90.93 million. In addition to more than doubling up of the population, urbanisation, industrialisation and economic development however chequered, stunted and disturbed these may have been, because of liberation war and lately drying up of foreign assistance and erosion of purchasing power due to fall in the real values of our resources and rise in the cost of import which in other words may be called adverse terms of trade, there has been after all some development. Interior areas in the country side have been opened up, more road transport vehicles ply and people's mobility have increased manifold. In addition to the above socio-economic background, development of the infrastructure, unemployment, recession, inflation and high cost of living etc. have added significant burden and economic distress on the common man. A large majority of the population are living below the absolute poverty line (According to an erstwhile Finance Minister, more than 80 per cent people live below the poverty line). Let me quote here from a very recent paper presented at the 6th Annual Conference of the Bangladesh Economic Association in October, 1983, a paper entitled "Strategy for Rural Development Projects" presented by Rural Development & Institution Division, Planning Commission:

"Share of income of the top 5 per cent of the households increased from 13 per cent in 1962-69 to 16 per cent in 1973-74 and then very sharply to 29 per cent

STATEMENT — II
Statement of serious crime for the years 1959-70.

Years	Dacoity	Robbery	Burglary	Theft	Murder	Rioting	Total crime reported under classes I-V.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1959	923	827	22,566	25,580	749	4,329	56,931
1960	944	899	21,382	15,322	880	4,579	56,768
1961	761	842	16,570	13,169	1,018	4,965	49,400
1962	1,094	961	16,813	11,999	1,012	5,034	48,439
1963	1,131	864	16,838	12,560	1,007	5,286	49,440
1964	1,080	972	14,929	11,782	913	6,050	46,301
1965	980	868	15,811	13,241	994	5,906	49,562
1966	1,166	918	16,842	14,713	1,074	6,487	53,241
1967	1,197	880	16,030	14,537	1,138	7,081	52,577
1968	1,189	808	15,728	14,209	1,103	7,713	52,441
1969	1,339	1,020	17,684	16,781	1,350	8,714	59,222
1970	1,323	1,077	16,540	15,605	1,262	8,773	59,005
Q.A. (1964-68)	1,122.4	889.2	15,868.0	13,696.4	2,834.4	6,647.4	50,824.4

STATEMENT — III

Year	Dacoity	Robbery	Burglary	Theft	Murder	Rioting	Others	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1973	5084	3949	12754	12267	2387	7823	19344	63608
1974	4737	3911	14586	14806	2572	8764	24049	73425
1975	2778	2853	12922	12961	2409	8487	20541	62951
1976	2265	2430	12615	14322	1843	9249	20932	63655
1977	1669	1985	12734	14073	1791	10402	19498	62152
1978	1282	1697	11570	15016	1638	12029	21576	64800
1979	1222	1422	9273	10197	1602	8422	30648	62986
1980	1064	1235	7719	9431	1891	7910	28905	58151
1981	1189	1272	4795	8370	1882	8450	28913	56871
1982	880	996	8000	9398	1769	5454	30122	56619

Statement IV below which gives number of reported cognisable cases and estimated population and the rate of crime per 1 lac of population between 1973 and 1982 brings out this aspect more poignantly. In 1974 with total number of cognisable cases at 73,425 gives the rate of crime per 1 lac of population at 96.55. This is apparently one of the lowest rate of crime in any part of the world, not only the developed part where the crime rate is indeed very high but also for a developing country. But the more astonishing thing is that since 1974 onwards with the crime rate at 96.55 it has continued to climb down perceptibly with total number of cognisable cases standing at 56,619 giving a rate of crime of 1 lac of population at 63.31.

STATEMENT — IV
Total number of reported cognisable cases and estimated population 1973-1982 with rate of crime per one lac of population.

Year	Estimated population in million	Total number of cognisable cases	Rate of crime per one lac of population
1973	74.26	63608	85.62
1974	76.05	73425	96.55
1975	78.04	62951	80.66
1976	79.88	63656	79.58
1977	81.76	62152	76.07
1978	83.67	64808	77.52
1979	85.64	62986	73.58
1980	87.66	58153	66.34
1981	87.95	56871	65.32
1982	89.42	56619	63.31

One would be quick to jump to the conclusion that in spite of abject poverty, unemployment, distress further aggravated by serious scarcity of food, foodgrains due to draught or flood, this must be one of the most glaring example of some thing happening in Bangladesh which is completely against the world trend. Some affected people do not bother to travel several miles sometimes wading thro

ugh 'haors' or crossing several rivers running through criss cross. There is also the tendency among local police officers at the police stations level not to register many of these informations where they could take chance to suppress such informations, because of their overriding obsession with any increase, nominal or real in the crime rate as compared to their predecessor's regime or with the previous year as a direct reflection to their efficiency and ability in preventing crime and suppressing preventable criminal activity irrespective of the availability of various facilities, implements including transport and communication. One may, however, readily concede that since 1976 in addition to test relief operations, under Food for

to fall upon, some of these could be deemed to be the potential offenders specially against property offence case (thefts, burglary, robbery, dacoity, etc.). Even conceding that some increase in the number of police force have in fact taken place in the last 5/6 years supplemented by the rural police, by the creation of VDP (Village Defence Party) nevertheless all the different positive and negative aspects need to be studied, assured and evaluated by some responsible members of the law enforcing agencies, Police Directorate and Home Ministry. Not only by Police Directorate and Home Ministry but also by the various Colleges of Social Welfare and Social Work and Departments of Sociology there is supreme need for such studies of the elements, and co-ordinated and integrated effort by the law enforcing agencies and the academics so that the decision makers at the highest level can get real picture of the socio-economic scenes. Fluctuation in crime rate is a very important barometer by itself for devising correct ways and means for prevention of crime and crime potential situation and also in devising various other socially inescapable institutions like the Remand Home, Juvenile Courts, Probation and After Care system, etc., etc. Faulty or doctored/managed collection of criminal statistics which does not reflect at least nearest approximation of the realities may not prevent their day of reckoning and save the law enforcing agencies even at the lowest echelons because these are actually found out eventually and in their totality the results are so appalling and disastrous to the community at large. There is thus a supreme need for their reconciliation and appropriate study by the law enforcing agents as well as by the academicians.