

The Poor Important Offer

Great news. Salam phones Zillur, proposes dialogue. After that what? Nothing, if one chooses to go by the records. The tough-talking BNP secretary general knows only too well that the opposition parties have been going to extremes of political action not just to get a phone call amounting to little beside bonhomie. This is utterly inadequate — as inadequate as earlier abortive overtures. No basis for a dialogue has been put out and no indication of any mechanism to materialise the offer has been given. Poor is the word for the exercise. And in the light of national interest the move, if it is at all such, is pathetic.

BNP is agreeably a pastmaster in losing opportunities. The Prime Minister or her party could very well talk to the Opposition about the appointment of the new Election Commissioner. This could help substantially to prove their bona fide about protestations of ensuring fair election. The opportunity was not availed. And now Salam's talk of government not being constitutionally required to do consultations on the point makes things worse.

For close on to five months, the government has been administering the nation with little better than half a parliament. And it has been striving assiduously to sheer off that great show of mass resignation by MPs of any significance, treating it as nothing if not a wholly wrong-headed act of circus. All this was not greatly helped by an unending stream of vituperatives calling the opposition conspirators out to wreck the country. The setting for a dialogue could not be more wanting.

The welcome-phone call should have contained much more than it did to offset all of the above and more. The misfortune that it amounted to no more should, however, be allowed to make the move infructuous at the very outset. The opposition owes it to its army of supporters and the nation at large to pull at whatever opportunity comes its way, if only to prove its own bona fide as the champion of a free and fair vote. It takes at least two to shove the nation to the basket of unsustainable curiosities. Let not the highminded opposition be the other party to the ruin. Now it is largely for them to fashion a goodly straw to pull at out of a poor offer.

Danger at the Coast

A swelling of the sea caused by a depression in the Bay of Bengal submerged large areas in the country's coastal belt. The worst affected part seems to be Hatia, where eight out of nine unions went under water, and its adjacent areas. A tidal upsurge measuring eight to 10 feet high in the Bay and the river Meghna caused widespread destruction. Reportedly, 400 homesteads of one union were engulfed by the river Meghna and about 30,000 people affected. The good news is that no casualty report has been received from any of the affected areas.

However, this is only a small consolation for the families who have lost their homes, crops and other valuables. The 30,000 people who have sought shelter on high roads and embankment are now exposed to the elements and inclement weather sweeping almost the entire country.

One improvement in avoiding death or minimising casualty has been made possible because of greater awareness among people and some preparedness against cyclone by some government agencies and voluntary organisations. That the 30,000 people moved to roads and embankment before the upsurge of water owes to timely action by some local people and private voluntary organisations. But had the watery deluge been on a large scale, greater preparation would have been warranted. Now the question is whether we are capable of such preparations. Earlier there was a report that the proposed cyclone shelters in many coastal areas were not constructed. Cannot we make our preparations ready before the danger comes rather than lamenting our lapses we surely could have avoided?

As for the victims of this low-scale water swelling, the urgent need is to provide them the means with which they can rebuild their homes and get into the normal strides of life. Soft credits, distribution of seeds etc. can be of help in this regard.

Bus for Women

A piece of news from Chittagong is most heart-warming. For two reasons. First, it is a private initiative first of its kind in the country. Second, its potential, if fully realized, can bring about a sea of change in our transport area. The news concerns the introduction of buses exclusively for women in Chittagong city. The novelty here is that the Chittagong City Bus Owners' Association has done the job on its own initiative. The report is not clear about the number of buses but it seems it is no less than two. Since buses will start plying on the same route at the same time from both ends. It is good to hear that the initiators have a plan to increase the number of buses.

One gets the impression that the initiators want to see how the buses for women actually work. In this respect, Dhaka's experience with women's buses introduced by the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) may throw some light on the issue. The BRTC initiative seems to have failed. Not because of lack of women passengers or any other fault on their part. If the cause has to be found anywhere, it is in the BRTC's half-hearted effort. Buses were too few and too irregular to serve the need of women passengers in any acceptable manner. Unless such buses are reliable and women can think of them as a true alternative to public buses and other modes of transport, they are not likely to make any impact on the city's transport system or be economically viable.

The bus owners in Chittagong have nothing to fear. Because they have already announced the time of the buses' operation. Moreover, private buses in the country run, almost without exception, profitably. That factor is in their favour. There is no reason why this initiative in Chittagong will not succeed. Last but not the least, Chittagong has taken the lead in this area. And there is no harm to follow this good move in other cities and towns where women are at a disadvantage because of heavy passenger rush.

At last the government seems to have come to senses — it has decided to bring an end to the system of administrative-distribution of fertilizer that cost at least 17 lives besides causing irreparable loss to the season's crops and badly damaging the credibility of the current regime.

The government has also decided to revert back to the old order — it brought an end to the four-month old embargo on the private sector to distribute fertilizer. The old order was displaced in January last to avert a "severe fertilizer crisis" created by "dishonest traders" to tarnish "the image of the government on the one hand and destroy the agro-economy on the other."

Of course, the government cannot let it happen — it has to punish the dishonest traders and hoarders, make sure that fertilizer reaches the farmers, save the agro-economy and uphold its own great image. And for doing all these, the government — that remains officially committed to free market economy — found the market economic principles — the invisible hand — awfully inadequate if not outright ridiculous.

It resorted to good old days of administrative management of the economy and entrusted the district administration officials — the visible hand — to distribute fertilizer. The private sector — that has been distributing fertilizer "quite credibly for several years" — was eliminated from the market. Some private traders were even arrested, many others were harassed in different parts of the country.

The result, however, was not so gratifying. The deputy commissioner administered fertilizer distribution system resulted in hoarding of fertilizer by a segment of the privileged group — who earned easy money by obtaining permits, restricting supply, charging higher prices and even by smuggling out the fertilizer in the neighbouring country. After all, when was the last time that the good offices of district administration did a better job in the management of economic problems?

Reports suggest that facing violent peasant protests, the government resorted to indiscriminate firing at several locations. At least 17 peasants died and hundreds of them were injured. Never before in the history of this country the farmers — the mainstay of the nation — lost lives for securing fertilizer, an essential ingredient for their product.

Politically, besides provoking severest attacks from the opposition, the fertilizer imbroglio has already caused enormous discontent — if not strong resentment — among broad masses throughout the country. Few will be surprised if some of those anguish surface in the next general elections.

At the national level, the fertilizer crisis prompted dismissal of the minister for industries. Some parliament members of the ruling party, including some cabinet members, were apparently involved in the bungling. Reports suggest that some of them simply transacted permits while others jumped the queues in the factory gates to gain from the artificially created shortage

of fertilizer in the country. Reports also have it that some of the "easy money" made out of the crisis, in fact, ended up in the ruling party's campaign fund.

The fertilizer fiasco received a definitive boost when officials of some donor agencies and governments began to criticize the government publicly for the crisis. Notable criticisms came from the chiefs of World Bank Mission and American Embassy in Dhaka. The reasons are obvious — both the organizations played instrumental roles in

streamlining the fertilizer distribution system in the country that paid good dividends up until February last when the current crisis set in.

It is particularly noticeable that some senior cabinet members — who otherwise demonstrate enviable skills for grabbing favourable remarks by the donors — were so enraged that they did not hesitate to suggest that the donors should seek permission from the government before opening their mouth. And they were asking the donors to shut up while scrapping a private sector

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Don Quixote's Fertilizer Ride

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Worldwide, crime is on the increase. The root causes are the essential factors responsible for man's false views that eventually lead to the use of lethal weapon, smuggling, corruption, abuse of power, political victimization, organized crime, local as well as regional and international. Distinguished criminologist Dr William Clifford used to say that "Crime is the price one pays for freedom and in a way that is done although it depends where one lives and with whom". And here lies the basic importance — the urban social life has proved to be more fertile ground for immoral activities and indiscreet exposure of vices — where the so called urban sophistication have prevented some one to interfere in others' activities knowing well that is undesirable. A simple example — a show of willingness to step in with a word of advice to children whom we see misbehaving in public and who are not supervised, is more visible in small community than in urban area — where this is rather interpreted otherwise.

In the backdrop of the situation stated above there has been research in social defence system and some of the developing countries have set apart quite a portion of their budget for assessing the impact of technological development vis-a-vis moral degradation and to halt the increased disturbance in the family structure. Unfortunately, in the developing countries of which Bangladesh stands as a unique example, the unusual population boom within comparatively less habitable area. On one hand and dire poverty and innumerable jobless vagrants on the other, have posed a serious threat to normal life. But this has not drawn as much at

attention as it deserved from pundits who are concerned with perspective planning and objective law enforcement. Result, to-day we do not have the authority of the old guards who used to lead the family as per age-old norms and practices.

Traditional Asiatic culture had and continues to have a strong influence on concept of criminality and social response to offenders. The need to rely on community support and co-operation in Crime Prevention and Offender Rehabilitation requires active interaction within community entities. This may take a form of public information programme and the media and press can contribute more than any other means to explain the role of legal system, family discipline, individual rights and obligations in achieving societal and governmental goals to bolster the campaign for a "Better Tomorrow" from a "Stormy Today".

And here comes the role of Non Governmental Organization and voluntary service core to live up to the expectation in this practical realm of the wide spread and ever increasing menace of criminal incidence — particularly in the sector that is Urban Poverty. It is in the fitness of the objective that I would mention the role of the

NGO like Asia Crime Prevention Foundation established in February 1982 — based in Japan having Consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council. Its aim is to promote sustained development, peace and stability in the Asian region as well as Worldwide, through more effective crime prevention and criminal justice policy, programmes and mutual cooperation among all those concerned. The Foundation seeks to enhance the capabilities of personnel working in this field through appropriate training programmes, research and information exchange as well as continuing contacts and special meetings, highlighting priority issues and reinforcing the bonds of solidarity among members as a basis for practical collaboration.

Accordingly, the Foundation has sought to reinforce the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice network focusing first of all on UNAFEI a significant part of whose training programme cost the foundation defrays; but enlarging its scope of activities also to other areas, as its resources increased. ACPF has also made possible important substantive programme advances in the formulation and application of United Nations norms and guidelines. It co-sponsored

Urban Crime and Delinquency: Efforts Must be there for Prevention

by M Enamul Huq

A show of willingness to step in with a word of advice to children whom we see misbehaving in public and who are not supervised, is more visible in small community than in urban area — where this is rather interpreted otherwise.

expert meetings of UN Standard Minimum Rules for Administration of Justice (Beijing Rules), UN Standard Minimum Rules on Non Custodial Measures (Tokyo Rules). It has also collaborated with ESCAP in first UN regional survey on juvenile crime delinquency and in assisting the Regional Adviser on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Most of these activities were carried on in cooperation with UNAFEI in its role as a regional UN Training and Research Institute for furthering UN programme, priorities and information on UN standard and guidelines. In furtherance of the objectives, ACPF held three conferences in Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur and Manila. It also organised the first drawing and essay competition for youth of the correctional institutes in Asia in collaboration with UNAFEI Alumni Association to promote public awareness of the impor-

tance of juvenile delinquency prevention dedicated to Asian Harmony-Heart to Heart.

The countries and cities of Asia and Far East are among the most beautiful in the world and most of them have benefited from the region's dynamic growth and increased prosperity. But as the urban population in the region expands further, the pressure on and strength of fragile urban infrastructures and the need for social support services can be expected to increase. Poverty in the midst of plenty takes its human toll, and where legitimate opportunities are scarce, the likelihood of illicit short-cut increases. Scores of "street children" having to feed themselves, and the plight of prospectless youth, even if educated, are a reminder that more must be done towards sustainable and equitable development. We have learned that Government policy must be supplemented by grassroots

support and partnership of various kinds — specially between businessmen, workers, people of different sectors and providers of services e.g. education, employment, health, housing, criminal justice, law enforcement. And, above all, mutual understanding and cooperation among the different agencies having the same theme is a must.

ACPF has by now been well-known throughout the international arena for its active role and positive contribution to wards making the world safer for our next generation.

In the context of the present day situation I feel tempted to quote the words of Martin Luther King, "Sooner or later all the people of the world will have to discover the way to live together in peace." And "Less Crime, More Justice and Security for All" is a definitely positive step towards that cherished goal under the benign auspices of the United Nations Organization — to attain the motto of ACPF: Prosperity without Crime.

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What we were simply appalled by his attitude towards the issue. They were not in a mood to tolerate the slightest criticism. Pakistan army had become a sacred cow that could not be touched. It had become too big for its boots and their wings had to be drastically clipped.

Peerzada had the reputation of being an intellectual in the army. It must have been an especially foul day for him. Instead of replying to us courteously he chose the surest way to lose an argument. He should have spoken with cold logic and hard facts.

Our sense of pride was hurt. "Hey this guy cannot tick us off like this. We are not a bunch of juveniles." So, we began our offensive in a concerted manner. The interesting thing was that the conversation/encounter/debate was limited to one on a part or the crowd (4/5 probationers only). The others were not aware of the incident at all.

From our very limited knowledge of