The Baily Star Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Wednesday, May 17, 1995

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 agreedly 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 wrongheaded 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 infrutuous 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 heartwarming. 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.

T 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

The government has also decided to revert back to the old older - it brought an end to the four-month old embargo on the private sector to distribute fertilizer. The oldorder 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 feaches the farmers. save the agro-economy and uphold its own great image. And for doing all these, the government - that remains of ficially committed to free market economy - found the market economic principles — the invisible hand — awfully inadequate, if not outright ridicu-

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 fertil-

TT T ORLDWIDE, crime is

essential factors responsible

for man's talse views that

eventually lead to the use of

lethal weapon, smuggling, cor-

ruption, abuse of power, politi-

cal victimization, organized

crime, local as well as regional

with a word of advice to chil-

dren whom we see misbehav-

ing in public and who are not

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uation stated above there has

been research in social de-

fence system and some of the

developing countries have set

apart quite a portion of their

budget for assessing the im-

pact of technological develop-

ment vis-a-vis moral degrada-

tion 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 popula-

tion boom within compara-

tively less habitable area. On

one hand and dire poverty and

innumerable jobless vagrants

on the other, have posed a se-

rious threat to normal life. But

this has not drawn as much at-

experience

In the backdrop of the sit-

terpreted otherwise.

on the increase. The

root causes are the

Don Quixote's Fertilizer Ride 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.

izer by a segment of the privi leged 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 indiscrimmate 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 elec-

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

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

manned fertilizer distribution system for which the donors spent millions of dollars.

Lately the government has appointed a one-member committee to investigate into the matter. It is given two months' time to find out the causes of the fertilizer predicament. But neither the composition of the committee. nor the time given to it or the mandate defined for it seems to be adequate to dig into the magnitude of the fertilizer crisis or to ascertain its short or long run impact on the economy. By all means, the

by CAF Dowlah

streamlining the fertilizer

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

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 anatomy of the lertilizer crisis should be spelled, our before the nation in clearest terms.

The nation should know why this crisis broke out in the first place. Why so many lives were lost? Why the season's crops had to be sacrificed?

Why the government had to scrap private sector distribut tion of fertilizer and opt for administrative means? How the private sector-led fertilizer distribution system — based on first come first serve principle that was put into place after years of hard work and that worked effectively for several years — failed all on a sudden?

Why the private traders that were marketing fertilizer in the domestic market smoothly for years suddenly became unscrupulous' and resorted to smuggling"?

Besides, what was the role of the government during the crisis? Facing the "artificial shortage", the government reduced the price of fertilizer twice - ultimately it was selling a ton of fertilizer at Taka 3.725 instead of the previous rate of Taka 4.725 per ton. How does such a decision make sense economically or politically? The issue here is shortage - anybody with basic commonsense knows that it demands in crease in supply, not reduction in price. Moreover, as the peak season approached, farmers were ready to pay any price for fertilizer. As the price moved downward - Taka 1.000 per ton - Bangladeshi fertilizer became cheaper compared to that of neighbouring India. The price differentials were not so big before. Therefore, some fertilizer may have crossed borders. But who could be responsible for this -the government or the "unscrupulous traders"? After all, it is the government that created the

Instead of reducing the price, a wiser government could have increased the supply of fertilizer. The government could have done it easily. Considering the increased demand of the peak season in

price differentials and en

larged the profit margin for

the potential smugglers.

the domestic market, the government could cut down exports of fertilizer. During the July-October period of last year, the government exported 434,000 metric tons (MT) of fertilizer as against only 298,000 MT during the same period of 1993. No wonder, the government could not meet domestic demand for 300,000 MT in February-March of this year, and thus, contributed to the so-called "artificial shortage" during the peak season. Once the crisis broke out,

the government committed the second grave mistake - it resorted to administrative solution to a major economic problem. Shortage of fertilizer in the market - no matter who created it - does not demand replacement of market forces. Moreover, doesn't it deserve little more thinking on the part of the government to dislodge a fertilizer distribution system that was put in place after decades of hard work, and that was paying good dividends even until the "artificial shortage" broke out? How can a democratic government, which also remains committed to market-oriented policies, replace a private sector led system with an administered one without discussing the pros and cons in public?

reverts back to the old system. chances for bunglings in the future may diminish, but questions will remain about the loses incurred, damages done, and lives lost. The fertilizer crisis once again taught us one. of the oldest lessons - economic problems require economic solutions, departure from this principle does not help much. Perhaps, the policy makers of the country would find time to understand it, and thus, will spare the nation from such Quixotic adventures in the future.

Anyway, as the government

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.

and international. Distinguished criminologist Dr William Clifford used to say that "Crime is the price one tention as it deserved from pays for freedom and in a way pundits who are concerned that is done although it dewith perspective planning and pends where one lives and objective law enforcement. with whom". And here lies the Result, to-day we do not have basic importance — the urban the authority of the old guards social life has proved to be who used to lead the family as more fertile ground for imper age-old norms and pracmoral activities and indiscreet tices 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

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 cooperation 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 To-

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 would mention the role of the

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

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 further ing UN programme, priorities and information on UN standard and guidelines. In furtherance of the objectives ACPF held three conferences in Tokyo, Kualalumpur and Manila. It also organised the first drawing and essay competition for youth of the correctional institutes in Asia in col laboration 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 benefitted 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 likelyhood of illicit shortcut 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

support and partnership of various kinds - specially between businessmen, workers, people of different sectors and providers of services e 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 wellknown 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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We were simply appalled by

Bureaucratic Mystique in South Asia A K M Jalaluddin

What the CSP's were Taught — VII Day of the Generals

tour of April, 1967, we went to yarious places including the Army and Air Force Headquarters. We heard Air Vice Marshal Yousuf at the Air Headquarters in Peshawar He was one of the most effective speakers you could find - anywhere. He was precise, sharp polite. He made his speech highly interesting by his native witticism and saucy stories.

At the Army Headquarters, we were given a briefing on the role and objectives of the Pakistan Army, Major General Peerzada, the Adjutant General kindly hosted a rea party for us. Those were, let us remember, the days of the Generals and Robber Barons in Pakistan

Literally, there ensued a tempest (sharp exchange of arguments) over the tea-cup As we were drinking tea, a colleague of ours questioned the wisdom of the 1965 war. He maintained that precious national resources had been wasted in the pursuit of an unrealistic goal

This observation ignited the fury of General Peerzada. He became very angry and started hurling all kinds of sarcasm at our friend. The General apparently forgot that he was the host and he was doing an injustice to the army tradition of courtesies and politeness to

General Peerzada it seemed to me, had heard this question the nth number of times and was apparently in, the last tether of his patience. He said that only anti-Pakistani elements were spreading such allegations against the patriotic

and valiant army of Pakistan. The General's reaction sad dened me deeply. Instead of giving a logical reply to a perfectly legitimate question, he had chosen the ways of the Mochi Gate and spoke in terms that would only appeal to Bazaar crowds. There was no effort on his part to give a cool, rational reply to the question posed by us.

that Government policy must

be supplemented by grassroots

Some one among us had to lose his temper and give him a befitting reply. I did not want to be the first to lose temper with the General, I wanted some West Pakistani to come forward and call his buff.

Let us remember, once again, the time of this discussion (April 1967). The war of 1965 September was very much a live issue and one would be surprised if this did not exercise our minds. A heavy amount (to many Bengalis, unjustifiably heavy) was spent every year on our defence forces with the idea that they would be used in the most careful manner. The Kashmir venture was a fiasco. ill-planned and ill-executed and predicated on illusory and unrealistic premises. That's a piece of legitimate criticism.

Haggani (from the Punjab) and Shah (Sind) exchanged glances. We thought the General was being too heavy with our self-effacing col league. General' Shah said. We see no reason why one should lose his temper on this question. Surely you do not expect the whole world to agree with you even if you did the correct things." And they did not do the correct things", Haqqani interjected loudly.

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.

> 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/

Instead of replying to us cour-

teously he chose the surest

debate was limited to 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 tactics and strategy as obtained through foreign journals we think your "operation" grandslam was an unforgivable blunder'

"grandslam" was Ayub's own idea.) "We do not think this army is any good, we should cut down its allocations by half, we said. "The cut should be drastic

half will not do. We should cut down the White Elephant's expenditure by two-thirds. That will cut out the fat and keep the muscle," others said Peerzada did not know how to

We continued to tease the General (he had earned it by his conduct). Javed from the Punjab said, not exactly to the General, but very much within his hearing. "We do not need a standing army at all it is un-Islamic. During the time of our Prophet (sm), and the Caliphs there was no standing army. So if we mean our Islamic title of the Republic seriously it should be disbunded as mediately " Now II was the treatment turn to be surprised by the absurdity of our conduct.

A journey to Darjeeling: Some

Sir. A few weeks ago I along with my family went to Darjeeling for sight seeing. During our brief stay at Darjeeling we went to an antique shop. When the shopowner came to know that we were Bangladeshis, he made some adverse comments on some Bangladeshi parents whose wards were reading in the local public schools. What he said was that some rich Bangladeshi parents are setting bad trends by coaxing school authorities in receiving handsome amount as donations to the local public schools where their sons or daughters were studying. During their frequent visits to Darjeeling most of these philanthropic parents stay in such hotels as The Windmere Hotel (rent Rs 4000 per day). The trend is so phenomenon that the school authorities are now more interested in Bangladeshi students than the Indians, causing bad feeling among the local communities. On way back to Calcutta, we made a brief stopover at a government run motel at Shiliguri. While we were taking lunch at the restaurant one member of the motel staff came and profusely praised generosity of a Bangladeshi businessman who

had been meeting all the ex-

penses of education of a motel

employee's son in Calcutta.

There is nothing wrong in spending money on philanthropic work both at home and abroad. Rather it is praiseworthy to make efforts in betterment of quality of life by one's available means. But the question is whether these generous people are carrying their donation money legally to India and these people are equally, if not more, generous in their home country. A close look at their passports may tell a different story — carrying US dollar 400 to the maximum, on each oecasion of journey. Then how could they meet expenses of their luxurious travel, let alone donating amounts. Perhaps they carry Aladin's lamp!

Calcutta, we were enjoying scenery in the morning on either side of the track. Land was dry, without any crop, only some winter vegetables here and there. While the train was crossing a bridge we were amazed to see a big river flowing at the brim as if it was a river during monsoon. A river flowing to the brim in Falgoon is unbelievable. But we came to our sense when a co-passenger told us that the diverted water from Farakka had been flowing through this river. It was a sense of shock that how a powerful country, perhaps to punish a neighbour, was depriving her of legitimate share of the water!

Zaved Hasan Green Road, Dhaka

During our train journey to

in the houses of affluent neighbours. They work for their own survival as neither their parent nor the state is in a position to any condition for stoppage of work of the children without providing them with any alternative facilities for food and clothing will be contradictory to human rights. Again any trade restriction on the point of child labour is tantamount to protectionism. The children now working in different profession are being grown up as skilled workers. The International Human Rights Organisation should consider the case of Southeast Asia from a different and realistic angle.

Child Labour

Sir, If we examine the economic scenario of Southeast Asia we will see most people of the region cannot readup their children, 'or arrange to feed and clothe them. As a result the children are being forced to go out for work to save themselves and their family. members from the curse of starvation. If they are not allowed to work they may be compelled to start begging. stealing and shop-lifting etc. I do not find any reason why a poor child having no means to survive should be barred from working.

In the countryside children

between 10 and 12 years of

age go to the farmland to help

their parents in the cultivation work. The female child works feed them and clothe them. So

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Kalabaghan, Dhaka.