

Public Crushed under Politics of Revenge

THE responsibility for Sunday's pandemonium, in our considered opinion, falls squarely on the government. We would like to know what actually instigated the police into launching an assault on the procession, which was by and large peaceful. We see in the police action a reflection of the ruling party's premeditated design to thwart the opposition programme at any cost. Completely unwarranted and despicable as the police's intervention was, it carried the signature of the government's inclination to encroach upon the democratic right of its political adversaries to peaceful and disciplined demonstration. We would want to record our displeasure and condemnation at the government's repressive role in this particular case. Sadly, Sunday's fracas was not one of its kind, nor did the government or its law enforcement agency unnecessarily push a situation to the verge of total lawlessness for the first time. In fact, the ruling party has, from the very beginning of its tenure, put on display a disturbing inclination towards trampling the opposition's democratic rights under foot. Such a mindset is not only irrational but also detrimental to its own political interest, inevitably swaying public sympathy in the opposition's favour.

The opposition's role is to be equally condemned, if not more. Understandably, the activists were enraged by the police intervention; but why take it out on public property? The orgy of destruction that they indulged in just after the police action was anything else but reflective of their pro-people commitment. They are no less culpable than the ruling party when it comes to inflicting on the citizenry utter discomfort, not to speak of the damage of life and property. Equally illogical, as usual, was their instantaneous call for three days of hartal—12 hours on Tuesday and 36 hours from Wednesday. What logic is there to hold the nation hostage to their grievance against the government? It seems that the opposition has blurred the difference between agitation and infliction of pain to people. Hasn't the nation paid enough price for its overindulgence in hartal?

Step by step we are going into a dark hole of mindless, vengeful, destructive politics. As the political parties feud, ground from under the feet of both AL and BNP is shifting and criminal elements are filling up that space. We urge our leaders from both sides to realise the suicidal nature of their politics and desist from destroying the country any further.

A Home Secy at Last

THE government has at last been able to appoint a Home Secretary. For two weeks this powerful position remained vacant in the absence of a 'trustworthy' bureaucrat. The new appointee has been brought back from his LPR (Leave Preparatory to Retirement) to fill in the vacancy caused by the retirement of former secretary Shafiqur Rahman who was also there on contract basis. This is a unique case of an important position remaining vacant for a long time in spite of the fact that a number of Additional Secretaries did not get new position because of 'credibility crisis', according to a report in the *Prothom Alo* on Monday. At first the present secretary of the communications ministry was appointed Home Secretary in place of the retiring one but the appointment was cancelled within 24 hours for reasons best known to the government.

The position of Home Secretary is normally recognised as a 'hot seat' and a very powerful one at that and there should not be any dearth of contenders for this powerful position among the bureaucrats. But the intention of the ruling party is very clear. Unless they find someone absolutely trustworthy they are not going to take any chances, specially during the last 18 months of their rule. There were names in the fray and lot of speculation, but the government's unbridled liking for politicisation of the administration has had its impact on the appointment. It is amusing to note that finally some one had to be selected from the retiring lot once again.

However, we mean no disrespect to the new Home Secretary; in fact he enjoys a considerable reputation as a professional officer. While welcoming him we would only like to remind the government that professional bureaucrats are far better than ideologues as administrators. We wish the new Home Secretary all success as his tenure is likely to be quite difficult.

Worthy Initiative

INSTANT success of the on-the-spot electric connection initiative, which got underway at East Bakalia ward in Chittagong last Sunday, has proved that complicated subscription formalities with their additional harassment, at times, induce many to opt for illegal consumption of electricity. On-the-spot connection is indeed a novelty born out of desperation but it was effective nevertheless. Its success surely adds a positive dimension to the Power Development Board's fight against systems loss and pilferage. While illegal connection has often been ascribed as one of the major reasons of extremely high systems loss in electric supply, not much thought has been given to ascertain the reason why people go for it. The East Bakalia experience certainly encourages a different outlook on the whole issue.

Basically, the moral of this small-scale yet significant success is: the PDB must see to it that the prospective subscribers are not deterred by cumbersome formalities. The duration between application for connection and installation of power lines and supply should be truncated as much as possible. There should be direct contact between the PDB and the applicants, precluding presence of middlemen. Many prospective subscribers having been cheated by the middlemen were forced to go for illegal connection.

The East Bakalia initiative is a demonstration of what proper planning and wit can do. We hope the PDB would take cue from its success and direct its effort accordingly. Subscriber-friendly approach such as the on-the-spot connection could very well bring about an improvement in the electricity supply scenario.

TELEGRAMS

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