

## Cold-shouldering it is not the remedy

*Chattra league needs an ironhanded treatment*

IT appears that the Awami League has come to the end of its tether as far as the Chattra League is concerned, and, being able to do nothing to rein it in, has chosen the easiest and the least unpleasant option, to ignore the student body. This is of course not the official position of the party, but in certain postures of some senior AL leaders in respect of the Chattra League reflect the advice of the party president and the PM to them to shun it.

Well, this may be an action out of exasperation of the party leaders at their utter failure to check the unruly members of its student wing, and they may even consider it a safe option, but giving cold-shoulder to its student body is hardly the response one expects from the AL. Given the litany of criminal activities of the Chattra League ever since the AL has come to power, the reaction is not only inappropriate, it is also inadequate.

There are two sets of issues that have tarnished AL's image in the 16 months that it has been in office. One of it is inherited in the form of the ailment of the power and gas sector. And although the problem is not of its making, the situation may not have assumed a crisis level had the AL acted at a faster pace than it has done so far.

The other issue, the situation created by the activity of its student wing, is the result of the AL's neglect, and it must not fail to see its gravity. The unbridled criminality of the Chattra League is the major cause of the rapid erosion of public confidence in the party; and the fact that such activities are being carried out with total impunity has also turned popular sentiment against it. The grievances of the people are genuine, which the AL can overlook only at the risk of its political future.

The argument, offered by the AL, that the Chattra League is no longer linked to it is merely technical and does not hold any water. No one, not even the most politically uninitiated person on the street believes that to be the case.

It is time the party leadership put their heads together to find out how to handle the problem. They must understand that it is too late to hide behind inane arguments; they must not fail to see that every single action of the Chattra League, from tender scam to admission trade to violence on the campus, is providing fodder to the opposition, and unless something is done quickly, by way of punitive action against the errant Chattra League leaders, the situation may go beyond redemption.

## HC directive on ship import

*It must be followed strictly*

THE High Court has asserted that pre-cleaning and environmental certificates must be collected before ships are brought to our territorial waters by the importers. The directive came after the HC found that shipping ministry officials were misinterpreting the court's earlier directive issued in March this year and allowing import of ships for scrapping without collecting such certificates.

The HC directive is important for many reasons. There have been quite a few fatal accidents in our ship-breaking yards over the last few years which took a heavy toll of human lives. It is no secret that most of the ship-breaking yards, which have poor safety and maintenance records, have a highly negative impact on the environment, apart from their being a cause of loss of lives.

Against this backdrop, the HC ordered the ship importers to collect the pre-cleaning and environmental certificates from the exporting countries. It is not clear how the shipping ministry officials could bend the rule and interpret it as being applicable only to 'green ships'. Are they not aware of the junk ships that pose such a grave risk to the workers at the ship breaking yards? How could they overlook the fact that exporters of ships containing toxic substances still treat Bangladesh as a soft target? The point can be elaborated by the attempts they made in the past to burden us with such ships that no other country in the world would accept!

In fact, the ship breaking yards are neither following the safety regulations, nor attaching due value to the workers' lives. Yet, the number of the yards is rising sharply, which suggests that the business is highly profitable. The point now is whether the owners will be allowed to carry on the business which is an environmental concern of great magnitude, or some safety regulations will be introduced to protect the workers and the environment.

The ship importers could have eliminated the risk factors to a great extent by obtaining pre-cleaning and environmental certificates from the importers, but their failure to do so allows hazardous ships to enter our territorial waters.

We welcome the HC's position on import of ships and fully endorse the renewal of its directive that the ships wanting to enter our territorial waters must obtain the pre-cleaning and environmental certificates. This will eliminate the hazards associated with allowing uncertified ships to be scrapped in our yards.

## Of endangered chain of command and other aberrations

The harsh reality is that we have failed to introduce administrative changes in tune with the provisions of our Republican constitution. The police have remained largely distant from the people and disliked as before. The Police Act of 1861, despite its preamble, prioritizes collection and communication of intelligence affecting the public peace.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE columns of The Daily Star have, of late, carried multiple worrisome comments about the quality of criminal investigation, police discipline and performance. The post editorial of 4th May says, "A highly efficient, transparent and accountable system of policing has been developed in the countries with the strong backing of the constitution; as a result, political people or bureaucrats find it extremely difficult to influence a criminal investigation."

The 'Daily Star' editorial of 7th May while commenting on the endangered police chain of command and impressing on the imperative of police reform says "that the virus of politicisation which has been eating away at the vitals of the police administration was introduced through the brazen political nature of recruitment into the police service in the past." It pleads that the rot must be stemmed immediately.

The editorial of 9th May while deliberating on the issue of police professionalism says that "We have a situation these days where many among the political classes, especially those who ascend to power at given periods, blur the distinction between the party and the government and, again between the government and the state."

The above, without doubt, make disturbing reading but in the fitness of things should perhaps compel concerned citizens to introspect and look back with a view to getting a clear insight into this serious public issue. Looking back one would see that our colonial masters, the British, had no incentive to reform the system. Pakistanis who followed were 'no more than faithful' to their predecessors and neglected police reforms.

When seen in some historical perspective one would find that the inherited colonial system has been expanded and strengthened and largely continues to perform its repressive role and political surveillance functions at the cost of its proper role. A deeper look would reveal

that internal incentives do not exist in desired manner to professionalise the service.

Ground realities indicate that there do not exist sufficient safeguards to insulate the police from group conflicts in society and enable it to act in a non-partisan manner. Cynics say that politicians do not want to professionalise the service because control over it is central to political conflict in a sharply polarized society. It would not be an exaggeration to say that policing in all countries is politically partisan to an extent; and that portraying the police in liberal states as neutral arbiters in public order situations could be misleading.

The interesting phenomenon is that Bangladeshi estate which was the product of

a bloody freedom struggle adopted a written, liberal democratic constitution but retained the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures without recasting them to meet the changed situation.

Historically speaking, the British, an alien element, were interested in maintaining imperial control for surplus extraction. They needed to have information on the moods and opinions of the public and on the possibilities of agrarian and industrial unrest. By mid 1930s police coercion became a vital instrument of state policy.

To the British, crime and politics were inseparable; defiance of state authority was a serious crime and a prelude to rebellion; political resistance was a crime or a likely occasion for crime.

The resources and skills developed in combating the former were freely deployed in defeating the latter. It is, thus very significant to appreciate the political purposes behind the origin of our police system.

Some cynics say that politicisation of the police is the price for the democratic functioning of the country. The prevalent wisdom tends to put all the blame on the political class, ignoring the negative role of the police leadership.

The harsh reality is that we have failed to introduce administrative changes in tune with the provisions of our Republican constitution. The police have remained largely distant from the people and disliked as before.

The Police Act of 1861, despite its preamble, prioritizes collection and communication of intelligence affecting the public peace. The prevention and detection of crime are included in the duties of the police only in section 23 of the Act.

A considered view is that political leaders and other government functionaries should be ready to proactively give up their long-held powers of 'superintendence' over the police in favour of a political public safety commissions charged with the responsibility of designing and implementing measures necessary to ensure political neutrality of police operations.

There is no denying that in a democracy police could not be wholly autonomous and political intervention is both inevitable and necessary to some extent. Therefore, there is a need to specify areas where government interference is justified and others where it is not.

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## History in the making

Britain has never had a peacetime coalition government before. If it survives the full tenure it will indeed be a seismic shift in British politics.



Strange bedfellows!

MAHMOOD HASAN

THE drama over the formation of the government in Britain has finally come to an end. The Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats have joined hands to govern Britain. After 13 years, the Labour Party will now sit on the opposition benches.

David William Donald Cameron (43), leader of the Conservative Party, has become the new occupant of No. 10 Downing Street. Cameron became a Member of Parliament in 2001 and rose rapidly to become leader of the Conservative Party in 2005.

Since the parliamentary elections on May 6, which produced a hung parliament, the three major parties -- Labour, Conservative and Lib Dem -- have been engaged in frenetic negotiations over the formation of a coalition government. The media was full of stories and conjectures over whether a coalition would emerge or not.

It took five days for the Conservatives and Lib Dems to thrash out an agreement.

Together, the "centre-right" Conservatives (306 seats) and "center to centre-left" Lib Dems (57 seats) will have a comfortable majority of 363 seats in the House of Commons of 650 seats.

On May 10, Gordon Brown announced that he was stepping down as leader of the Labour Party. Brown, having failed to woo the Lib Dem to his side, announced that he was resigning as prime minister in the evening of May 11 and left No.10 Downing Street.

That set-off a chain of events in quick succession. Soon after Brown tendered his resignation at Buckingham Palace, David Cameron met Queen Elizabeth II, who asked him to form the new government. Cameron then went to No. 10 Downing Street and made his first statement as the new prime minister.

Nicholas William Peter Clegg (43) had a meteoric rise in British politics. The Liberal Democrat leader has been appointed as deputy prime minister. Nick Clegg was elected as Member of Parliament in 2005 and took over the party

leadership in 2007. He was elected Member of the European Parliament in 1999. Nick Clegg has taken a calculated risk in joining the Conservatives. If the coalition collapses before its full tenure, the Lib Dems will be the greatest losers.

The last time Britain had a coalition government was in May 1940, when Neville Chamberlain's national government resigned and Winston Churchill formed an all-party coalition government. It was indeed a war cabinet. That government collapsed in 1945 when WWII ended with Germany's defeat.

A key area of the agreement between the Conservatives and Lib Dems is reducing the budget deficit -- the current deficit of £164 billion (Euro 189 billion), which is 11.6

percent of its GDP, is extremely worrying for Britain. The new government will cut spending by £6 billion in 2010. Immigration from non-EU countries will be restricted. A proposal for election to the House of Lords on the basis of proportional representation will be brought forward.

Reforms in the tax structures for different areas will be introduced. A referendum will be held on whether more power to EU should be transferred. Britain will not adopt the Euro. Trident nuclear missiles will not be replaced. There will be a referendum on alternative voting (AV) system.

The question that analysts now ask is -- how long will this coalition survive? Britain is used to a bipolar political system. What happened on May 11 is considered unusual. Lib Dems have more in common with the Labour Party, but the two actually did not have the numbers to form a government.

The election manifestos of the Tories and Lib Dems were divergent in nature. During the election campaign the two parties crossed swords on a number of issues. It is unlikely that the backbenchers of these two parties will now hang up those weapons. For instance, the Lib Dems had all along wanted proportional system of voting. For the Tories it is not a priority.

If the proposal on alternate voting system goes to a referendum, the Conservative MPs will no doubt fight

against it. Again, though the two parties want to reduce the ballooning budget deficit, the Lib Dems are worried that a spending cut will allow the economic recovery to stagnate.

The two parties are so far apart on Europe, immigration, welfare, voting systems, etc that analysts think the two young leaders have gelled together only for power. It is seen as a marriage of convenience. The Agreement can at best be called a "minimum common denominator" for the coalition government.

The areas of conflict may not be far. How David Cameron manages the coalition and survives will be worth watching. The ghost of mistrust between the two will lie in the implementation of the policies.

David Cameron announced the new cabinet on May 12. William Hague (Tory) is the new foreign secretary; George Osborne (Tory) is the chancellor of the exchequer; Dr Liam Fox (Tory) is defense secretary; Vince Cable (LD) is in charge of business and banking; Chris Huhne (LD) got environment and climate change and Ms. Theresa May (Tory) will be the home secretary. The Lib Dems will have four cabinet posts and 16 other positions in the new government.

However, the announcement of the cabinet has calmed the market in London. The share price index (FTSE) went down and the pound sterling was under pressure the past week due to the uncertainty surrounding the hung parliament.

As for the Labour Party, it is most likely that former foreign secretary David Miliband will succeed Gordon Brown as its new leader. They will be waiting for cracks to emerge in the ranks of the Conservative and fresh elections.

Cameron and Clegg have been making statements that the new government will last its full tenure despite differences between the two parties. Cameron said that the coalition could mark an "historic and seismic" shift in British politics. Actually, Britain has never had a peacetime coalition government before. If it survives the full tenure it will indeed be a seismic shift in British politics.

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