At the Mercy of Whimsical Leaders

SHAKHAWAT LITON

LGRD Minister Syed Ashraful Islam's claim last Monday, that the government knows nothing about the arrest of Nur Hossain, the prime accused in the Naryanganj seven murder case, in Kolkata, India, should not come as a surprise, rather this may be treated as a whimsical remark that some of our politicians indulge in. He said whatever the government knew about this case was through the media. Ashraf, general secretary of Awami League, might have forgotten what the state minister for home affairs had said a day before, regarding the arrest of Nur Hossain.

On Sunday, State Minister for Home Affairs Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told reporters that an Indian magistrate had informed the home ministry about the arrest of Nur Hossain and his accomplices. An Indian anti-terrorism squad, led by ACP Animesh Sarkar, had arrested Nur and two accomplices, Shamim and Asif, from a multi-storied building near Dumdum Airport around 11.50 pm on Saturday. Nur Hossain was also put on remand on Sunday by Kolkata police. Newspapers in Bangladesh have run reports giving much importance on the development. Amid such a situation the LGRD minister's claim is rather interesting and it has raised questions about whether the home ministry is a part of the government or not.

A few days ago, the public has had the pleasure of listening to other such whimsical remarks from BNP leaders and later by the prime minister herself. In countering Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's attack on BNP's founder late Ziaur Rahman accusing him of having link to the assassination of Bangabandhu, the BNP leaders alleged that Hasina might have known about the killing of Zia. They made a surprising insinuation regarding Hasina's return to Bangladesh weeks before the assassination of Ziaur Rahman on May 30, 1981. BNP senior vice-chairman Tarique Rahman went a step further by saying that Hasina should be remanded for unearthing the mystery behind Zia's murder. The PM later countered the BNP leaders by saying that Khaleda and Tarique should be remanded for this. The trading of such outrageous accusations have left the public amused and dumbfounded.

Former military dictator HM Ershad must have enjoyed this bout of mudslinging. Everybody knows Ershad was the biggest beneficiary of the assassination of then President Zia. BNP chief Khaleda Zia has recently also accused Ershad of the assassination of Zia and Major General Manzur. But curiously, Ershad was not named as the alleged killer of Zia in the war of words waged by the AL and BNP leaders. Again Ershad has been the biggest beneficiary of the prevailing situation.

The current situation has only exposed the State's failure to establish the rule of law in the country. Negligence of proper enforcement of laws brings social disorder and anarchy and the latest incidents in Narayanganj and murder of upazila chairman in Feni have once again proved this beyond any doubt. It has also exposed the AL-led government's inability to uphold the rule of law.

In both cases in Narayanganj and Feni, the administration has also failed to act on its legal mandate to enforce the law to maintain social order. Their failure has give rise of the criminals who belong to the ruling AL and have carried out the barbaric killings. The administration has failed to perform due to over politicisation and the excessive influence on it by partisan politics. The dark side of excessive politicization has also given the top administrative officials a free rein with their affairs. The relation between the government and the officials has become give and take. They have been serving the government to achieve its partisan interests and in return the officials have been trying to take personal benefits. The present situation is therefore, very complicated. With an absence of the rule of law, security experts are doubtful about the government being able to improve its image and prove its credibility.

One of the fundamental responsibilities of the State is to ensure security to its citizens' life and property. The onus of discharging the State's responsibility lies on the government that governs the country. And the government is also legally bound to ensure security to people's life and property. In so doing what is required is to strictly enforce the laws of the land. When the rule of law is established, security to people's life and property is ensured and social order is maintained. Legal experts, therefore, often term law as the glue that holds the fabric of society together and protects us from the risks of social disorder and anarchy.

So, now there is only one way to save the day - let the law, not whims and vengeful politics, govern the country.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.