

# Time for all to act

*Law & Order Down*

THE law and order situation throughout the country seems to be worsening. Each day brings bad news, adds to the people's worries and makes them wonder where we are heading. There may be some respite in the Wana violence, but the happenings in the Sui area have given a new dimension to the national scene. The supply of gas to domestic and industrial consumers has been cut, the worst hit being power and fertilizer industries. Also, after the interior minister's press conference on Wednesday, the induction of troops into the Sui area to protect the gas installations seems imminent. That may improve the security situation around the gas complex, but that would by no means put an end to the problems of violence and terrorism that the Sui trouble reflects. In another act of banditry, criminals in the "kuchcha area" kidnapped 12 Wapda officials near Rajanpur on Wednesday. And the three Sindh judges kidnapped in the Shikarpur area on Dec 3 have still not been recovered. All this in addition to frequent acts of terrorism, the murder of Anwar Bhaijan in Karachi, the attempt on the life of a religious leader in Gilgit and gangland warfare in Lyari. These are all disturbing developments that have contributed to a sense of acute insecurity among the people throughout the country.

Many of these crimes have political overtones and are linked one way or another with the kind of politics we have been practising in this country. The situation demands a national effort in which partisan and short-term interests should have no place. The government has already tied its hand. By attempting to isolate the PPP and PML-N, it has restricted

its own area of political interaction and been confined to dealing only with the religious parties. Not ignoring the MMA's own part in fostering the kind of military-dominated system we now have, the religious parties too have serious differences with the government on many issues. They may be focussing on inanities like the religion column in passport and the ever-present bogey of "obscenity" in the electronic media, but they nevertheless represent a sizable political force. They have differences with the ARD, but of late the religious grouping of six parties seems to have struck some understanding with the ARD on the question of the president's uniform. Taken together, thus, the ARD and MMA represent people throughout the country and can make a great deal of difference to the situation. What people wonder is whether these two alliances have their priorities right.

In the Wana situation, the MMA initially tried to play a role and had some modest success here and there but nothing that could be called decisive. In Balochistan, the MMA is part of the coalition government, and for that reason it should take a greater interest in whatever is happening in Sui. The ARD, too, has representatives from Balochistan in the national and provincial assemblies and can join hands with all political forces for defusing the situation. The crisis is in danger of getting out of hand, unless all parties — the government, the Baloch leaders and the ARD and MMA — sit together to sort the problem out. The issue is delicate; it involves both Baloch sensitivities and the security of the plants and pipelines that supply gas to the nation.