

SUNDAY POST

The big stick...

THE Government's decision to ban all gatherings and services in memory of those who died in the unrest of June 1976 was not totally unexpected.

We have come to anticipate the Government's actions with clockwork regularity. We know that whenever the Government believes it is threatened — mostly imaginary — it resorts to this kind of action.

The first indication of what the Government is up to was seen in the show of strength during the Republic Day festivities. Then, a week or so later, we had the police, assisted by troops, manning massive roadblocks at strategic points — a gentle reminder that Big Brother is watching.

And, with perfect timing, the announcement is made that the South African Defence Force has made another across-the-border raid into Angola, killing "200 Swapo terrorists".

For some reason, the Government believes the memorial services could be turned into violent incidents. Yet this Government should have known that June 16 will always be remembered by those whose relatives and children died. Banning them from getting together will not wipe June 16 from the calendar.

It was the Government that was responsible for June 16. If it had heeded the warnings from all quarters about the danger of an explosion, June 16 would not have been. If it had accepted the fact of the presence of blacks, and their right to political participation in greater South Africa, there would have been no reason to fear anything.

Already this country is bur-

dened with all sorts of draconian laws which are designed more to keep the black man in his place than to "maintain law and order".

Heaven knows, there will be more and more of these kind of laws. But laws will not put down people's aspirations. Laws will not make people conform to a situation they detest. Instead, the introduction of such laws only creates further machinery for "breaking the law" — contrary to the principle of justice.

The Government should be looking into ways and means of avoiding a recurrence of a June 16. We believe the Government has a responsibility to all its citizens to work out a just dispensation for the people of this country, and until all the sectional interests that are being protected are removed we will continue to see panic actions on the part of the Government.

We know people would like to forgive and forget the past. In fact, as reported on this page, some of the victims of June 16 bear no hatred for anybody. It is the system they hate, and it is the system that must be changed. If that happens, then those who have suffered will know they did not suffer in vain. Only the Government can put them on the road to that kind of thinking.

Failure to recognise this will result in similar actions come June next year.

But we do not have the time. We are in a crisis right now. We must all accept each other as partners in making this country an exciting place for everybody. The hand of friendship has long been extended from our side. We are waiting.

Foolish ban that will do great harm

IF THE authorities think they can make the township troubles go away by restricting the reporting of them, they are making a childish mistake.

And if they think this will minimise the international impact, they are in for a rude awakening.

From every point of view, in fact, yesterday's decision to prevent newsmen from having free access to trouble spots and to allow in only selected groups in the company of policemen was ill-considered. It means that in a time of national crisis, the concerned public of this country will be getting an incomplete picture of what is happening. Which is not only undesirable but downright dangerous. As the Steyn Commission warned only a few weeks ago, it can cause rumours to spread and public morale to decline through uncertainty.

As for trying to lessen the international impact, one would have thought the Government would have had enough experience by now to realise that the ban on foreign correspondents will mean we get an even worse Press abroad. They are making it look as though they are trying to hide the actions of the police — and nothing could be more damning than that.

The reason given for the ban is that some correspondents were allegedly inciting young black people to riot so they could take

pictures of them. But it is a spurious reason. If that did indeed happen the proper course for the police was not to ban all free access but to name the culprits, bring the evidence and prosecute them for incitement.

As it is the police have failed to produce any evidence to substantiate their claims and, as our report elsewhere today shows, they emerged from their confrontation with the foreign correspondents embarrassingly badly. Those lame explanations will go out into the world, conveying an impression far worse than any free reporting of yesterday's events could have done.

Foreign audiences will assume the worst — that the police wanted newsmen out of the way so that they could get ruthless without being seen. And at the same time the tag of Press control will be hung around our necks so that all official versions of what is happening will be suspect.

For our part we can only try our best to ameliorate the harm. Our task has been made immeasurably more difficult, but we shall endeavour as best we can to gather the facts of what is happening and convey them to the public. We invite individual members of the public to help by telling us what is happening in their areas. Despite the authorities, we shall endeavour to fight the common enemies of uncertainty and rumour.

Cold wind of no change

PROMISE of change creates a crisis of expectation abroad as well as at home.

Six months ago Britain's Minister of State was saying: "We note with admiration and sympathy Prime Minister Botha's determination to promote change..." The reaction of British and American newspapers ranged from the cautious to the favourable: they too were expectant.

But, on June 16 this week, The Times of London summed up British scepticism: "The four years since Soweto have been thrown away"; the policy is "little more than trying to oppose on every issue the inevitable consequences of apartheid in practice."

It is a dangerous shift: the more untenable the situation into which overseas observers believe they see Mr Botha's Government sliding, the less they will want to be

involved in long-term investment in South Africa. As Harold Macmillan rephrased the saying in his "wind of change" speech: "Mind your own business — but mind how it affects my business too."

With the high gold price safeguarding her balance of payments, South Africa can, technically, afford to cock a snook at her critics. But even if prices stay high there is always international uncertainty and the prospect of extortionist oil payments.

What is needed now is foreign investment to provide jobs, new technologies and foreign management to boost the skills pool. A minimum 5% growth rate is needed to keep pace with population growth and make an impact on unemployment. A stagnating economy will give potential investors who dislike Nationalist policies even less reason to come to South Africa.