

UK Deputy PM Clegg wants looters to face victims
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LONDON (Aug 16, 2011): Looters who ransacked towns across England last week must meet their victims and help clean up, British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg (pix) will say on Tuesday, as the coalition government struggles to agree on the best way to respond.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition is under pressure from many in the public to get tough on those who ran riot, but the smaller Lib Dems and community leaders have voiced concern over "knee-jerk solutions".

While the harder-line Conservatives have tapped into public disgust, Lib Dem leader Clegg, who has struggled to gain much sway over policy since forming the coalition in May 2010, has had to strike a balance between the hunger for justice and his party's wider social concerns.

"Those people who behaved so despicably last week should have to look their victims in the eye," Clegg will say in a speech, according to extracts released by his office in advance.

"They should have to see for themselves the consequences of their actions and they should be put to work cleaning up the damage and destruction they have caused so they don't do it again."

Community leaders warn that too harsh a response may only exacerbate underlying causes of tension in inner-city areas, citing inequality, public spending cuts and a lack of opportunity for poor youths as central to the problem.

Lib Dem Deputy Leader Simon Hughes, reflecting fears across the party, warned at the weekend against removing financial support for the poor or being too heavy-handed in punishing those responsible for last week's mayhem,

The Lib Dems have slumped in opinion polls since the election, with supporters disappointed by a series of policy reversals. Political analysts say the party may struggle to win back support before the next election in 2015.

Before the election, Clegg's party had been opposed to the Conservative plan to sharply reduce Britain's record budget deficit through hefty spending cuts, but the bigger party won out in coalition negotiations.

Cameron has denied that the unrest or tension is linked to his austerity measures and has promised more "no-nonsense" policing, tougher sentencing to tackle gang culture and steps to improve what he calls a breakdown in the moral fibre of Britain.

However, commentators and opposition politicians had warned that Britain, like other parts of Europe, would face social unrest because of its austerity plans, potentially leaving the coalition to pay the price at the ballot box, unless a stagnant economy picks up.

Both Clegg and Cameron will be judged for their responses by the public and their own parties, with Cameron already under fire for not returning from holiday sooner to deal with the disorder.

More than 2,800 people have been arrested since a protest over a fatal shooting by police on Aug. 4 sparked riots in north London which spread quickly across the capital and beyond to cities in northern and central England.

"We want people to be punished for their wrongdoing," Clegg will say. "We also want them to stop doing wrong. We want their future behaviour to change. We need punishment that sticks." – Reuters

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