

Focus on 100 days

Prioritise, home in on doables and deliver

PRIME Minister Khaleda Zia seems responsive to the pressure her unprecedented mandate to govern the country for the second time has put on her shoulders to deliver. In her first meeting with the secretaries to various ministries on Wednesday she decided to set her government certain goals to achieve within the first hundred days by way of getting the morning to show the day. Five committees have been formed to draw road-maps for definitive thrusts to be given to administrative affairs, law and order, poverty alleviation, human resources development and development of economic management. Headed by relevant secretaries, the committees shall submit their reports with recommendations to the government in a week's time. The recommendations that are adopted by the cabinet will have to be implemented within a hundred days.

We think the Prime Minister has shown the right spirit. That's the way to go. What is of the essence here is a well-thought-out time-bound agenda for action, not the one that could lead to breast-beating lamentations over failures or touting of excuses for the same. In extension of the energetic note the PM has begun on, it is to be only expected that a grip on the time-frame will be maintained from day one to the 100th day. In other words, if the committees have until October 25 to submit their reports to the government, the decision at the cabinet level as to which of the recommendations will be adopted has better be made within a week, i.e. by November 1. For, the 100-day count-down is already on, and the government can not afford any further whittling down of the time at their disposal to make a good start. Of Course, it is going to be much more than a mechanical exercise of discarding or accepting recommendations, entail as it does a careful examination of the feasibility of the proposals; even so, we believe, a week's time is a reasonable respite to arrive at an agreed set of agenda for the remainder of the first 100 days. Basically, the recommendations of the committees will have to come in the shape of formulations rather than wish-lists. Practitioners in development management as they are under shoe-string budgets, the secretaries are hardly expected to ask for the moon. They are to chalk out a programme of doables bearing in mind the compulsions of less-than-a-100-day time-frame. The agenda which the secretaries recommend ought to be practicable and implementable.

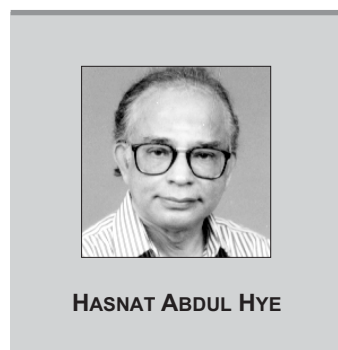
Then they go on to chart out a road-map for the first year as a whole, thereby giving themselves a spring-board for success in progression during the remainder of their tenure.

In keeping with the simplicity and directness of the spirit that characterise the formation of the committees at the behest of the PM, the secretaries' recommendations also need to be straightforward and uncomplicated. Let none of these be caught in a bureaucratic maze of complex detours.

There are hundreds of ideas, suggestions and recipes bundled together and proffered by think-tanks, task forces, special committees and commissions from time to time that just await adoption and implementation with clarity of purpose and unflinching determinations. All that the secretaries need to do is to sift through the heaps of material to arrive at a set of agenda that admit of being implemented within less than a hundred days' time. The wealth of recommendations we are calling the present government's attention to, are professionally reached conclusions. Whilst being thoroughly apolitical in motivation, they sit in well with the election pledges of the major political parties. Electoral commitments were in generalisations but among the repository of suggestions we have are some very detailed recipes for breakthroughs in important sectors which can be drawn upon for the present purpose. So, we urge the secretaries to respond to the challenge thrown up to them by the Prime Minister to give the nation a concrete set of agenda to forge ahead.

What we, however, find noticeably missing in the chart of committees and the tasks being assigned to them is a committee or committees to address the insufferable problems of pollution, traffic congestion and power failure. The gaps better be bridged to suitably round off the approach to the sizzling 100-day public expectation mould.

Hoping against hope?



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

IT was too good to be true and appeared like a miracle. But it was true nevertheless and also in an ordinary sort of way. Contrary to all dire predictions about all hell breaking loose on election day everything was sweetness and light, or almost. On that day when demons were predicted to stalk the land venting fury of the worst kind only five were killed and a few scores injured. Even by the standard of a normal day the casualties were few and far between. The election was so peaceful that police, BDR and army did not have to resort to any major intervention. The turnout of voters was unprecedented, particularly of women voters. Voters' enthusiasm bordered on festivity. Even the poorest of the poor felt proud of the power of enfranchisement. The five and a half million of observers, domestic and foreign, had only praise for the people concerned and admiration for the arrangement made. A few stray incidents did not mar the general picture of calm and orderliness.

Like morning showing the day, the smooth holding of election seemed to be a happy augury promising peaceful transition to a new government. With the help of leap of imagination the portents of democracy coming of age in the country could also be discerned. People, at least a significant number, could dare to think that the unsavory aspects of politics which had held the country to hostage so

long were now matters of the past or at least had been rendered less insidious. After all, the people in general had rejected almost unanimously the two Ms - money and muscle - through their votes. It was only natural to expect and be optimistic that there was going to be a turning over of a new leaf in the political game with the rules of engagement significantly altered. The hope was fondly held that the four-party alliance having won a landslide victory highlighting

symbols of change at the national level the vacation and reoccupation of halls signalled that it was going to be business as usual all the way. It cannot, of course, be said that the student cadre of the BNP moved under orders or with the blessing of the party high command. Most probably, it was a gut reaction in line with past practice followed by both the parties' student wings. But this time there was what is called a confluence of rising expectations among the

markets and their makeshift offices once occupied by the Awami League, soon became targets for BNP activists (The Daily Star). This, too, was a repetition of the past, a continuing saga of extortion and toll collection by mastaans and their godfather belonging to whichever party comes into power. These spots breed and nurture terrorism of more severe and more professional nature. Fund collected maintain a large number of musclemen who are used by the

and ineffectual should convince the parties about these outliving their utility. The last election has shown that our electorate, a good part of it, has become conscious and intelligent enough to vote without the fear of musclemen and the favour of money. Now is the time for the parties to close the old and unsavoury chapter and open a new one in tune with the temper of the time. Many are hoping that the party (ies) in power will take the lead shaming the opposition to

of responsibility. Unfortunately, the new government also did not seem to take the news with due seriousness. The local administration, on the other hand, appeared to have been in a doldrums because of the weariness of election duties and the lack of clear-cut decision during transition. But being nearer to the places of occurrence and being aware of their continuing responsibility to protect lives and property of citizens there is no justification for their lapses and dereliction of duty. Along with criminals responsible for the shameful and heinous acts defaulting officials should also be proceeded against. Meanwhile the government should take all necessary measures to compensate the minorities for their loss and reassure them about their safety. Concrete steps and not debate over the extent of accuracy of the reports published are expected from the government. Even if a minuscule number of minorities suffer at the hands of the majority it is a slur in the image of the country. The ruling parties should go out of their way to prove that they are the friends and well-wishers of minorities. Why should they allow the monopoly of friendship for them? For any government it is not good governance when minorities are discriminated and for political parties it is not good politics when they are alienated.

So far the only bold and exemplary step taken by the government to address terrorism is asking a minister to make his accused son surrender. It shows that the message from the last election is being heeded. Let this even-handedness, fair play and justice become the rule and not the exception. Is it hoping against hope? How can it be when hopes springs eternal?

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

Even if a minuscule number of minorities suffer at the hands of the majority it is a slur in the image of the country. The ruling parties should go out of their way to prove that they are the friends and well-wishers of minorities. Why should they allow the monopoly of friendship for them? For any government it is not good governance when minorities are discriminated and for political parties it is not good politics when they are alienated.

rejection of terrorism was willing and ready to heed the message and go for change. The opposition, defeated and distraught, was also expected to learn from their mistakes and avoid the narrow and lonely path. The dream and hope received a jolt all too soon. It did not take long for the harried people to realise that politics has a way of repeating itself, like history of which it is a part. Even before the election results were out the residential halls of Dhaka University witnessed a change of guard of an egregious style in the small hours of the night. The student cadres of the main political party about to take up the reins of power, stormed the bastions of student politics in the capital throwing out their rivals belonging to the defeated political party. It was nothing new on occasions like this, just a case of political vendetta at campus level. The bravura re-entry of the student wing of the major victorious political party resonated throughout campuses all over the country with similar take-overs. More than

cross section of the public. For many years under different governments campuses had turned into battlegrounds among student cadre and the campus had become a happy hunting ground of terrorists of youthful variety. They were used and abused for attaining and retaining power by the major political parties. It was hoped that with the righteous indignation and condemnation against terrorism registered by the voters in the last election, parties would lean less on their student cadre and thereby discourage terrorism on campus. The initiative for this momentous change was expected to come from the major party in power, the beneficiary of the vote against terrorism. The party in power may not have encouraged their student cadre to go about their old way but nor has it reined them in so far.

As if the developments on the student front were not disconcerting enough, the deserted spots for illegal toll collection, such as bus and launch terminals, ghats,

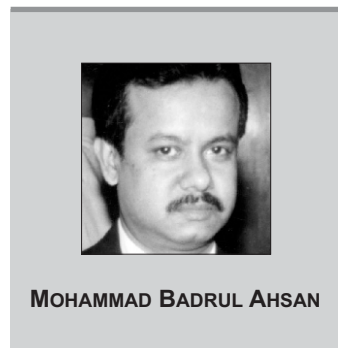
power that be according to convenience and need. But here also the people who voted against terrorism hoped to see a significant change.

Seeing history repeating itself the question arises: is business as usual inevitable in our politics? Seeing the same parties and the same leaders one would be tempted to say that such a change is a wishful thinking. But this pessimism misses the verdict given by the people against terrorism. More than the verdict it was the process of the verdict that is significant and which provides the basis for the hope for a qualitative change in politics. In the last election money and muscle in most cases received a miserable drubbing disproving the received wisdom (?) that without the two Ms election cannot be won. The voters proved the jeremiads wrong. Based on this verdict the political parties should wean themselves away from money and muscle power. The large number of cases where they have been shown to have become obsolete

follow suit.

Another kind of terror was let loose after the election this time, which surpassed the past and was unprecedented. No sooner had the election results were announced newspapers reported attacks on members of minority communities. Pictures of families taking shelters away from their hearths and homes were published day after day. This should have been anticipated by the caretaker government and arrangements should have been made by them for the protection and safety of minorities before their tenure was over. There is no report about any instructions having been given or measures taken by the caretaker government except taking measures for their own safety. The writ of the caretaker government did not end with the holding of the election (October 1) but continued till the new government took over (October 11). Since the intimidation and attacks on minorities started before the new government the caretaker government cannot absolve itself

Prayer for a marriage



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

VIRGIL had observed thousands of years ago that women are always fickle and changeable. But this particular woman waited for five years before she changed her mind. She waited for her soul to settle down before she decided to marry again. But that was the easy part of the change she sought. The difficult part was to choose amongst four men who had proposed.

When I asked her if I could write her story, she said that I had not heard enough. So she told me a little more. How she had learned several years into her first marriage that her husband was having an affair with another woman. It was her first rude awakening, the first wound that left a deep scar on her soul. She had confronted the man and dared him to choose between his wife and paramour.

She never hated him for what he did, because the sinner was only a victim of his sin. But she suffered the anguish of self-pity, the brutal shame of having to live with a man

whose heart had turned from her and gone elsewhere. There was no bigger disgrace for a woman, she told me, who could not keep her husband from another woman.

By that time she had children and was pushed into the deeper fray of life. Her parents listened to her and advised her to be patient. She wondered how man could get away with what would have been an unpardonable offence for woman. But then she was still very

ever-widening distance between them.

Did she still love him? The woman was not sure, but she felt a kind of compassion for him, which develops from long association. For that matter, one would feel the same kind of compassion for one's pets. After all they still shared the same bad in the same room under the same roof. They would attend social functions together and visit their daughter's school as parents.

hold bounds to face the real world.

Looking back, she never felt bitter about her first husband. He never abused her, except that she could not be sure whether he had ever disabused himself of his flame for that other woman. But his memory continued to live with her in the faces of their children, and she did not mind. She was drawn into the struggle for survival and had no time for sentiments.

But one problem remained. The roving eyes of men brought her

fear the future. She thought of one or two men, but her mind flinched back under the inertia of fear and doubt. It would not be before some time that blood circulated again in a constricted limb, she thought.

It took five years before that circulation happened. She agreed to marry for the second time, because her parents had grown old. And she also needed a man in her life who could give her strength to face the future with her daugh-

his best strength. He sounded innocent but arrogant, quiet but cautious, and interesting but sad. He was in his early forties and had never married before, he was the oldest son of his parents, and looked after the family business alongside that of his own. He was not very expressive, yet he was impressive in a curious way.

Her family was shocked by her choice. But she insisted on marrying this man, because she believed that he would be the right match for her. Much to its dismay, the family gave the consent and she would marry a handicapped man, crippled by Polio since his childhood. I asked her if she had made the right choice, if she was going to be able to love a man, who might draw her pity more than anything else.

She shot an angry glance, and said that I sounded just like her parents. What love has got to do with legs, which are nothing but bodily appendages? Love rises from the heart of a man, and nobody can pity him unless he asks for it, she said. When the fire is gone, it does not matter how a man moves, grasps, or touches so long as his heart responds to your calls. She does not mind that her husband walks on crutches, because she knows by now he can carry her wounded soul and will not abandon it.

She also said that should I decide to tell her story at all, I should also ask the readers to pray for her marriage.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

He told her that the best thing for being sad was to learn. No matter how one's honour was trampled in the sewers of the baser minds, there was only one thing for it then, and that was to learn. She wanted to learn and forget at once, to begin a new life where she would not have to remember the past and fear the future.

young and inexperienced, her mind unable to cope with the burden of that question. She consoled herself with what English novelist Iris Murdoch wrote, "One doesn't have to get anywhere in a marriage. It's not a public conveyance."

So, she thought like every other woman, and decided to stay in the marriage for the sake of her children. At the age of twenty-five, she had finished living for herself, and wanted to go on only for her children. There was nothing more boring and painful than a loveless marriage, she mentioned. A sea of silence grew between her and the man, except for occasional crackles, which children brought into the

Their worlds drifted apart once they bolted the doors of their bedroom, when each returned to their respective loneliness.

Then her life took a sharp turn, and her husband died of a mysterious illness. She felt sad for him, but did not know if she was going to miss him. For five years she searched the terrain of her should and the answer eluded her. But tragedy of life has a terrible capacity to multiply itself. Her dead husband's family would throw her out of the house without any means of support. She cried for a while until she realised that tears could not soften the rigours of life. She took a job, and for the first time in life, stepped outside the house-

constant reminders that the fate of a widow could not be better than that of an unanchored boat: any man would want to sail it in the waters of his whims. There were cruel comments from insensitive people, and lurid looks from debauch men, not to say that she was tempted to slip a few times.

Then a friend quoted from TH White's *The Sword in the Stone*. He told her that the best thing for being sad was to learn. No matter how one's honour was trampled in the sewers of the baser minds, there was only one thing for it then, and that was to learn. She wanted to learn and forget at once, to begin a new life where she would not have to remember the past and

ters who were growing up fast like wild creepers. When her family brought the proposals, she complied. But now she had to choose one amongst four, and she was baffled.

All four men were financially stable and one was settled in the UK. But she looked for something else, although for a while the UK resident loomed large in her mind. She met all four, and talked to them. They were nice men and they agreed to accept her daughters from the first marriage. She was still not satisfied. She did not know what else she looked for until she sat again with one of them.

He struck her as an unusual man, whose worst weakness was

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



STAR PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Inspection or joyride?

A solitary trolley car at Kamlapur station presents a strange sight as three railway officials sit pretty and safe pedaled forward through the tracks. The umbrella protects them from the sun and the muscles of a haggard trolley man from walking as they go on a ride to inspect the railway tracks. Not too many places have such quaint transports or such an archaic inspection system but the smiles seem to say that they are all having fun.

OPINION

Let Khaleda Zia give us good governance

MOHAMMED IDRIS

IN 1991, Begum Zia was elected the first woman prime minister of Bangladesh. Unfortunately as she was not then so politically experienced she was misguided by self-seeking advisors, sycophants and so-called economists and politicians barring a few good ones who stood by her. As a result she had to step down in a democratic process and Sheikh Hasina became the second woman prime minister of Bangladesh after assuming power took the people as gullible and for such mistakes and being wrongly advised, she and her party are thrown out of power this time.

From now on the path that lies before Khaleda Zia is not strewn with roses but full of challenges which are to establish law and order, the prerequisite for a good government, build up the shattered economy, root out corruption and to bring about stability by working in cohesion with the opposition.

It is now expected of her to exhibit the wisdom and sagacity of

a stateswoman rather than of a politician. She must not be complacent and guard herself against the political malaise like the turn-coats and opportunists who would now rush to her with bouquets, hoping to find protection against their wrongdoings and to be a wolf in sheep's coat.

We would urge her in all fairness that she should weigh the advice of her cabinet colleagues and advisers with great pondering because she is the head of the government. For anything going wrong the nation would blame nobody but the head of the government. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Therefore, there must be checks and balances in exercise of power. Our new home minister assuming his office made a speech to the police officials and the staffers of the home ministry where he directed them to work free from intervention from any quarters, be it anybody of any stature. We hope he meant what he said and his speech was not a mere rhetoric.

May I crave the indulgence to say that our newly appointed home minister belonged to a force

which is synonymous with discipline. The honorable minister would not find this code of discipline in civil administration. Police administration is very complex for various reasons. They are unable to work for the people because the police are mostly engaged in duties related to political activities and are brought under pressure by those who matter in the political party in power. It should not go unsaid that as police have unfettered power, there should be an independent body to oversee that police power is not abused and innocent people are not harassed.

The Cabinet ministers of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia are expected to extend their all out support to her so that she can rid the country of all ills, eradicate terrorism, stop the influential people throwing about their weight because of their connection with the political high-ups and high government officials and finally bring about a sense of security in the minds of common people who are guaranteed protection by the state under the Constitution.

We solicit Begum Zia to take note of the reports published in the

newspapers which disseminate information of what is happening across the country. The press and the media people are the sentinels of vigilance against injustice. The press and media people belong to the intellectual class and are conscientious objectors who also should be given due status and honour.

Health and education sectors have so far not received due attention. As a result educational institutions turned into political campus and instead of receiving education the students learnt terrorism. The products of our educational institutions virtually remain half-educated and for their poor knowledge of English many of them are denied higher education abroad. Hence, emphasis must be laid on acquiring good knowledge of English side by side the state language Bengali. The state language of India is Hindi but at the college and universities the medium of instruction is English. The net result is that India has a large number of English speaking and English reading people. No wonder, because of their knowledge of English they have made

access to the higher knowledge of science and technology and they are today manning the IT sector even in a country like USA.

Health sector has remained unattended to and our poor people in the towns and villages have little medical facilities. The demands of our people are not too many. They shall remain satisfied if they get food, cloth, shelter and medicine even at the minimal level.

As tolerance is virtue, Begum Zia would not be hesitant to give all out cooperation to the opposition political party and its leader and create such an atmosphere in the country during her regime that people of all castes and creeds and religions would live in harmony.

In fine, it may be said that the challenges before Begum Khaleda Zia cannot be expected to be overcome overnight. Given the good intention, we are hopeful that she will be able to address the core issues in order of priority during her time in office while the people of Bangladesh would be with her.