

**15 years of The Daily Star**  
*We renew our pledge to uphold 'Journalism Without Fear or Favour' and the 'People's Right to Know'.*

WHILE there has been no lack of effort, and always an unflinching commitment, to uphold our pledge, it is for the readers to judge as to how much we have been successful in fulfilling our promise. And if we have succeeded in any degree, a modicum of credit may perhaps go to our team effort, but by far the greatest share of the credit must go to our readers, without whose unstinted support and faith in The Daily Star it would not have been possible to live up to a commitment that has not always been easy to keep.

It gives us a sense of satisfaction to reflect that the growth of The Daily Star has been in tandem with the march of democracy in Bangladesh. It is with a sense of humility that we state that we have tried to play our due role in upholding the true spirit of democracy and democratic culture; something that is only possible if the press is unfettered.

And this is something that has been very close to our heart. The sine qua non of democracy in its true sense is a free media, fearless against odds and beholden to none, accountable only to the readers. It is not impartial stance but the need for objectivity that has compelled our actions in presenting the fact and the news to our readers, who are very astute in thoughts and can never be taken for granted. While neutrality by its character requires one to be equidistant, objectivity demands that we be closer to the truth, to the fact and to the right, rather than chart a safe middle path.

It is also the time to recall those that started us off in our onerous path, who are no longer with us, but whose contribution in making what we are today is immeasurable. We particularly recall the vision, the commitment and leadership provided to us by our founding Editor late S M Ali. We also pay our tribute to our founding Chairman late Azimur Rahman and founder Managing Director late A S Mahmud. We also recall the contribution of our Managing Editor Taufique Aziz Khan.

As we continue to chart the path we set for ourselves, we restate our pledge to work for 'Journalism Without Fear or Favour' and for the 'People's Right to Know'.

**Finance Minister's discontent over misuse of public fund**

*Ministries and government departments should respond forthwith*

THE Finance Minister's recent remarks at the launching ceremony of the Public Expenditure Management Manual and the Internal Control Manual on the prevailing state of corruption and the irregularities and wastage of public money in government offices are worthy of the attention of the entire government machinery.

The remarks made by the minister deserve to be recognised and applauded by all concerned, and the public at large. The rather candid description of how public funds are squandered by various government agencies and ministries is, to say the least, debilitating. The pattern that follows in the wastage of public funds cannot be something that developed in a day or all too suddenly, nevertheless, the frank expression of it all is worth noticing.

We find that an honest analysis of the minister's remarks is also indicative of an indirect submission of how bad things are and the minister's apparent inability to tackle the issue. The honourable minister has described to us how he had to put up with the state of affairs for long 13 years during which he served as a minister in successive governments. We thus feel his candid remarks should have been made much earlier when their impact could have been heard and understood better. We thus feel that he too should share the burden of the failure in bringing about stricter fiscal discipline in government offices, directly or indirectly.

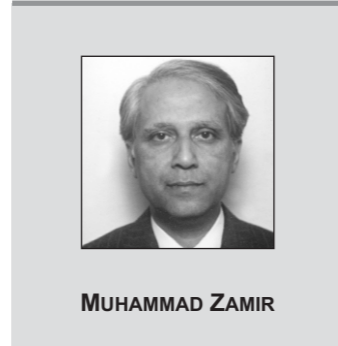
We find that there are two sides to the observations made by the minister. First, one facet of the problem is the corrupt practices amongst members of our civil bureaucracy, devoid of any moral and ethical considerations. The second part of the problem is the lack of political will on the part of the government in enforcing its authority and making the administration transparent and accountable.

Dealing with the endemic state of moral and ethical decline, not just in the civil service but elsewhere in the society, may be difficult and time consuming. However, that should not deter the administration from taking stern action against those who are in the wrong.

**Political earthquake in Palestine**

**POST BREAKFAST**

**Hamas has claimed that Europe and the US have to work with the new reality. It is also incumbent on Hamas to recognise the existing reality on the ground. Israel is here to stay. The United States is also firmly entrenched in the Middle East -- in Iraq, in the Gulf States, in Jordan, and Egypt. Hamas has to work within this scenario. They have to learn to move ahead in the peace process according to international dynamics.**



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

DEFYING exit polls, Hamas arrived last week on the Middle East political scene with a bang. This time, it had more punch than the explosives it has usually used in its fifty-odd suicide bombings inside Israel. Amidst excitement and tension, Hamas emerged as a clear and surprising winner in the historic parliamentary elections in Palestine, winning 76 seats in the 132 seat Palestinian parliament.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Abul Gheit, quite understandably termed it as the "creation of a new political reality in the region." US President Bush described it as a "wake-up call." Joseph Samaha, writing in Lebanon's As-Safir newspaper, also referred to it as "the first peaceful change of power of such fundamental proportions in Arab history." This last comment is significant given the fact that Islamist parties have sometimes done well at the polls in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Algeria, but have never formed a government. It may be recalled that an Islamist party scored a similar triumph in the first round of an election in Algeria in 1991, but was blocked from assuming power through a military inspired coup. This however has not been the

first victory for Hamas (an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement) in the electoral process. It enjoyed great success in the latest Palestinian municipal elections. This encouraged its leadership to participate in the parliamentary polls. The consequence has been an earthquake not only for the Palestinian political arena but also for the entire region. They have now heralded a dramatic transformation, a year and a few months after the passing away of Arafat.

The movement has now morphed from a militant organisation to a political party in less than a generation. Haim Malka writing in The Washington Quarterly (Autumn 2005) has correctly assessed that its participation on the national level is evidence of Hamas's adaptability and durability within Palestinian society and politics.

Needless to say, speculation and uneasiness has surrounded Hamas's newfound role among the United States, Israel, Europe, and many Arab governments. Critics from within these areas have suggested that Hamas and its militant agenda will result in greater instability and act as a catalyst for further terrorist activities.

On the other hand, several proponents have mentioned that expansion of Hamas's role and political activity in Palestinian national politics will ultimately moderate the movement. These advocates do not attach special significance to the fact that the Fatah political regime has had a decline. They point out that Fatah had it coming given their lack of accountability and significant corruption. I would tend to agree with them. It appears that Hamas, astutely, understood the frustration within the Palestinian political arena and decided to exploit the situation. In this, they have demon-

strated political pragmatism. This also encourages me to believe that this aspect of maturity will persuade them to modify their absolutist demands.

I have spent many years in the Middle East during my diplomatic postings in Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. I have learnt one thing during this time. What we have there is a high-stakes poker game. We have a dangerous mix of oil, feudalism, fundamentalism, and lack of transparency. The Creator understood this best. That is why He probably sent so many prophets to that region to continuously remind everyone concerned about morality, ethics, and peace.

Today, we are faced with a serious political impasse in the Middle East. The situation has become that much more complex because of the incapacitation of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the trouble brewing in Iran and Syria. Added to this, for the first time, is also the recognition among the Israeli leadership about the wisdom of disengagement and withdrawal from the occupied territories. There is still a lot of reluctance in this regard but it is becoming evident that mind-sets are changing because of demographic realities.

It is sinking in that a "Greater Israel" will also include millions of Palestinians whose population is increasing at a faster rate than those of the Jewish faith. It is also being understood that unless Israel is careful, there is likelihood of the Jewish population becoming a minority in their own country. It is probably this awareness that persuaded the Kadima leadership, ahead of the next Israeli elections on March 28, to stress on the process of continued unilateral disengagement. It appears that the Likud Party, under the leadership of

media-savvy Benjamin Netanyahu, has also understood the wisdom of territorial concessions to avoid the population time bomb.

The latest poll on the Israeli elections, taken just before the Hamas victory, had indicated that the new, softer Kadima Party was likely to win 43 seats in the next 120 member Israeli Parliament ahead of left-wing Labour with 17 seats and Likud with 13 seats. All this might change now. This will mean that peace making will be that much more difficult. The natural tendency on the part of the Israeli electorate will be to be nervous and cautious.

It is true that Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, in a keynote speech on January 24 (just before the Palestinian elections), had remarked that "Israel is unafraid of the prospect of Hamas taking over a greater share of power after the election." In all probability, he had anticipated that Hamas would win some seats and be in the Opposition. An overwhelming Hamas victory appears to have unsettled Israel's geopolitical equation sufficiently, to immediately persuade them to contact Russia on January 27 and to urge Russia to issue a statement that there can be no prospect of a Palestinian state unless Hamas renounces violence.

Hamas has stated that it desires a "political partnership" in the interest of the Palestinian people. They know the problems ahead of them-international legitimacy and lack of financial resources. There will also be the question of funding for an organisation/political party that is on the terrorist list both in the US and Europe. Discretion, consequently, will have to be the order of the day.

Egypt and Jordan, the two other central players in the peace-process, have made the right noises. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has asked the vanquished Fatah party and Hamas to work together to promote "peace efforts and realise the aspirations of the Palestinian people for an independent state." King Abdullah II of Jordan has similarly cautioned that "whatever the results of the election, the establishment of a Palestine State alongside Israel remains the only solution for establishing peace and putting an end to violence and extremism."

Hamas has claimed that Europe and the US have to work with the

new reality. It is also incumbent on Hamas to recognise the existing reality on the ground. Israel is here to stay. The United States is also firmly entrenched in the Middle East -- in Iraq, in the Gulf States, in Jordan, and Egypt. Hamas has to work within this scenario. They have to learn to move ahead in the peace process according to international dynamics, and not lose the sympathy of the Quartet, particularly, the European Union (the balancing factor with the United States).

The people of Palestine have spoken for change and good, clean government. This does not mean that they have supported more extremism. Hamas has to understand this.

Many radical organisations have changed over time to accommodate the broad interests of their constituents. We have seen how Sinn Fein has changed in Northern Ireland. Both Sharon and Rabin also gradually embraced reality. In this regard, Hamas would do well to heed the widely respected Palestinian leader Hanan Ashrawi's comments after the Palestinian elections. She has urged Hamas to abandon its extreme rhetoric and try to assimilate itself within the international community.

However, such efforts on the part of Hamas can only be one side of the coin. The world, particularly the United States, has to accept the democratic process and its results. There might be some danger in allowing an armed movement to reap the benefits of political participation, but integrating Hamas into the electoral and democratic process is a necessary step for the long-term strategy of democratizing Palestinian politics and ultimately creating an independent Palestinian state.

Hamas emerged in the Gaza strip during the first days of the Palestinian uprising in December 1987 and quickly assumed a leading role in the violent struggle against Israel. The movement has also focused on doing charitable works and providing social services such as Islamic education. Its aim, based on a blend of Palestinian nationalism and Islam, is to liberate Palestine through jihad. As a militant movement, till now, they have used violence and terror to achieve political ends. The time for change has now arrived. When they partici-

pated in the parliamentary polls they might have thought that they will win some seats and be in the opposition and pursue their objectives. This has however not been so. They have to rise to the occasion and agree to abide by international standards and respect the rule of law. The first step could be to refrain from brandishing weapons in public, an act that deepens the public's sense of insecurity and chaos. In this context, it was positive to note Syrian based Hamas leader Khaled Meshal's statement proposing that Hamas weapons could be absorbed into a united Palestine army if the international community wants Hamas to disarm.

As expected, uncertainty, stand-offs and bonfires have followed the election. Different Palestinian political parties, particularly Fatah, will however have to understand that such shambolic behaviour will hurt the Palestinian cause and strengthen the hands of those who consider the Palestinian Authority as dysfunctional.

At the same time, the Quartet, instead of shunning the new regime in Palestine, should carry on their task of finding peace through gradual withdrawal from occupied territory. Withholding financial support will be self-defeating. It will only make things worse and isolate the already suffering Palestinian population even further. It will also lead to greater frustration and extremism.

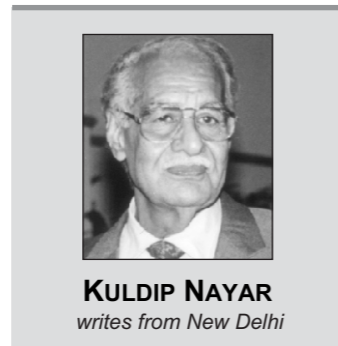
In this context, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's visit to Ramallah was an encouraging and welcome step. Merkel's views and comments of Palestinian President M. Abbas during the joint press conference, provided clarity for all sides with regard to the future dynamics of the peace process and the economic perspectives related to future financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority. Palestinian President Abbas has shown perspicacity in the manner in which he has handled the problem until now. He needs to be supported by the Quartet.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

**Bend it like Congress**

**BETWEEN THE LINES**

**The reshuffle has marred Manmohan Singh's reputation in some way. The re-induction of Shibu Soren from Jharkhand was a mistake, whatever the pressure. It indicates that Manmohan Singh, too, has come to believe that corruption is a way of life in Indian politics. Probably, the Prime Minister has got convinced that if the tainted Lalu Yadav can stay, why stall Soren? This only confirms that a clean economist and bureaucrat like Manmohan Singh is learning the tricks of trade: Discretion is better part of valour.**



KULDEEP NAYAR  
*writes from New Delhi*

It may be reading too much into the cabinet reshuffle in New Delhi. But the changes effected make me believe that Congress president Sonia Gandhi has begun the exercise of choosing her party candidates for India's President and Vice-President, the two offices falling vacant by next August.

My hunch is that Dr Karan Singh, a tall Congress leader, is being saved for the office of President. He has not been inducted in the cabi-

net, despite his seniority. He himself is reluctant to join the cabinet. More than that, Sonia Gandhi does not want his name to be smudged in any way. The politics of ministerial position would have dragged him to one controversy or the other.

The founder of an international Hindu forum, Karan Singh would be acceptable to the BJP. Significantly, he has never said anything against Hindutva. The other point in his favour is that if there were to be a contest it would be close. Karan Singh would be the best choice from among the Congress leaders. He has not rubbed people on the wrong side. (Karan Singh says that his horoscope predicts his elevation to the office of President.)

The Congress candidate for the vice-presidency is likely to be Sushil Kumar Shinde, till recently the Andhra Pradesh governor. He belongs to the scheduled caste whereas Karan Singh is a Rajput, the upper caste. Such considerations are important in the multi-ethnic society that India is. Shinde

lost to Bhairon Singh Sekhawat last time because the latter was better known. Since the vice-president is elected by the two houses, the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha, Sonia Gandhi's expectation is that Shinde in the cabinet has more opportunities to fraternise with MPs than he would have had if sequestered at Hyderabad. However, Shinde's induction may be ominous for Man Vilas Paswan, a scheduled caste leader. He may be axed. He displeased the Congress when he refused to join hands with Lalu Prasad Yadav in the state election in Bihar. After losing power at Patna, Lalu Yadav has been pressing for Paswan's exclusion from the cabinet because Lalu blames him for dividing lower caste votes, Lalu Yadav's forte. The fact that Lalu Yadav has been able to get his Man Friday, Minister for Company Affairs Ram Prakash Gupta, elevated to the cabinet status shows that Lalu Yadav's 24 members in the Lok Sabha are crucial. In any case, the Congress

has in Shinde a scheduled caste leader and the exit of Paswan from the government would not be much of a loss for the Congress.

The most intriguing part of the cabinet reshuffle is the manner in which Sonia Gandhi has got finally rid of her coterie and that too at one go. Was she tired of them and their self-importance? They still believe that they have her ears. It is one thing to be at 10 Janpath where Sonia Gandhi lives and another to be in the government wondering whom Sonia is consulting. They know in their heart of hearts that she would not have let them go if she really needed them. Probably, they had outlived their utility. Their worry is that there may be another coterie, indifferent if not hostile to them. The argument that Sonia Gandhi wanted more of her own people in the council of ministers does not hold water. Every person is hers. Who is Manmohan Singh anyway? And his admiration for her was visibly clear at the press conference.

Not that Manmohan Singh could have reshuffled the cabinet without Sonia Gandhi's consultations. But he has revived the old Congress practice whereby the Prime Minister consults the party president before constituting or reshuffling the cabinet. Mrs Indira Gandhi was the one who stopped the practice. After becoming Prime Minister in 1966 with the help of Congress president K Kamaraj, she sent the cabinet list to the President of India straightaway without even showing it to Kamaraj. Rajiv Gandhi did not have to do so because he com-

bined both offices of Prime Minister and the Congress president. So was the case with Narasimha Rao.

The reshuffle has marred Manmohan Singh's reputation in some way. The re-induction of Shibu Soren from Jharkhand was a mistake, whatever the pressure. It indicates that Manmohan Singh, too, has come to believe that corruption is a way of life in Indian politics. Probably, the Prime Minister has got convinced that if the tainted Lalu Yadav can stay, why stall Soren? This only confirms that a clean economist and bureaucrat like Manmohan Singh is learning the tricks of trade: Discretion is better part of valour.

Unfortunately, the cabinet reshuffle has cut short the debate on the Supreme Court's judgment on the dissolution of the Bihar assembly last March. Governor Buta Singh had dissolved the assembly on the ground that no party was in a position to attain a majority. The Supreme Court has held by 3-2 that the governor's act was mala fide. It also criticised the Government of India for taking Buta Singh's "fanciful assumptions as gospel truth."

No doubt, the governor was interested in helping Lalu Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal form the government with the backing of the Congress. But he was equally determined to stall other political parties from coming to power. He became a part of the plan hatched to keep the non-Congress parties out. The Supreme Court has rightly hit

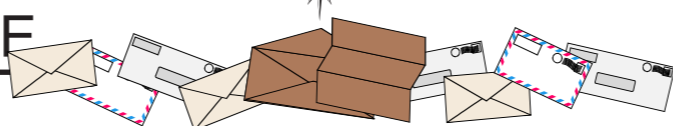
the governor on his knuckles. The Supreme Court's advice to the government to verify the facts before accepting the governor's report is pertinent. But in this case New Delhi was in fact goading the governor. My short trip to Patna a few days ago confirms this. Three central ministers phoned Buta Singh on his mobile many a time. He himself said in press interview that he did "what he wanted to do."

The sequence of events testifies this. Buta Singh sent the report for fresh elections on Sunday, May 22, a holiday. The central cabinet met the same night at 11 pm and approved the governor's recommendation on the dissolution of the assembly. The cabinet's resolution was e-mailed to the President, then at Moscow. He received it at 1.52 am and faxed his approval at 5.30 am itself. Why this indecent hurry?

The Supreme Court has said that the governor "misled the council of ministers." If this is so, the mere resignation is no punishment. Shouldn't there be some way to teach a lesson to those who play havoc with the constitution and the nation? Maybe, the institution of ombudsman when it comes into being can do something about such motivated acts. Till then what happens? If tainted ministers cannot be dropped from the cabinet, probably governors like Buta Singh can also get away with the crime they commit.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

**TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR**



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

**Big neighbour**  
India is going to build Tipaimukh Dam in Sylhet border to block the water flow to Bangladesh. It is violating the international laws concerning water sharing.

As our big neighbour, India should try to ensure that its bilateral relation with us is never strained. After all, good neighbourliness will benefit both the countries.  
**Taslim Hasan Sabu**  
*University of Dhaka*

**Voting right of expatriates**  
We are nearly eight million Bangladeshi expatriates working in various countries of the world. We are known as wage earners. Although we live far away from our beloved families only to fulfill the requirements of our families, we are contributing to the economic growth of our beloved country by sending foreign currency as much as possible.

It has been simultaneously recognised many times by the Bangladesh Bank, country's newspapers, intellectuals and political leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties that there is a major role of Bangladeshi expatriates in every "budget" of the country. But it is a matter of great regret that although Bangladeshi expatriates are helping their country's economic growth by sending millions of foreign currency, they are not allowed to take part in general election as a candidate for membership of parliament and even they are not enlisted in the voter list of their own constituency. As a result, when they are in the country at the time of parliamentary election or any election they could not participate in voting, despite being citizens of Bangladesh. And it is happening due to some provisions about citizenship in the constitution of the country and the rules set by the Election Commission.

of international passport, could send money to homeland and regularly visit our country, then why shouldn't we be included in the voter list? We think it is a violation of our rights. If our leaders want remittances from the expatriates then what is the problem in enlisting us as voters? If anybody complains about fake voting by expatriates, we would like to tell them since each and every expatriate is holder of international passport, if they are enlisted in the voter list of the country and appear to exercise voting right with passport, it will be a clean deal. In the light of above circumstances, I would like to request the policy makers of the government of Bangladesh and Chief Election Commissioner of Bangladesh to take step to regularise the voter list of the country by enlisting/including names of all Bangladeshi expatriates all over the world. Which easily is possible by collecting data from their heads of the

families, so as to enable them to exercise their voting right when they are visiting the country and/or through the embassies in respective foreign countries.  
**Mohd. Muslim Uddin**  
*On e-mail*

**Suicide**  
Well, as I was going through the newspaper as usual, a piece of news attracted my attention on 31 Jan. It was about a teenage girl like me committing suicide, and the reason was very simple, that she was adopted!  
At first, I was shocked, and then I felt sorry for her. May her soul rest in peace, but she should have thought what she was doing. For starters, adoption is very common in our society. As a result, one may actually have a better future by being adopted than that she could have. It is a bit harsh but it is the fact. But why commit suicide? Maybe it was a personal matter, but we all should be thankful to such opportunities in life.

Nowadays suicide tendency is increasing among teenagers, but we should take a moment at least, to think about what we are going to do. Because, life is precious. Well, before making it too sloppy, I would like to offer my heartfelt condolences to her parents who are suffering from the loss of their loved one.  
**Sameeah Zahangir**  
*Dhaka*

**Bangladesh moving ahead**  
Let me draw a parallel between a small company and a small developing country. Sooner or later investors will notice and flock to invest in a company as long as it grows. I have observed one thing being 25 years in the United States and have been working in the financial arena for long that investors avoid small stocks in early bull market but when all blue chip stocks run up through the roof and investors cannot afford blue chips or there is not much growth oppor-

tunity in blue chips any more, then they turn to small stocks trading in smaller exchange. Those small stocks trading in their low multiples start moving up. Not all of small stocks will participate in bull run but the promising one will participate in the next run up. Good investors know about it and they start buying slowly and keep adding to their portfolio. One stock I like to point out is Computer Associates (CA). Computer Associates was a small software company in Long Island, New York. I saw how a small software company would become a software giant in less than 20 years. Now Computer Associate is a blue chip company. CA is a major competitor of Microsoft and Oracle. I would like to draw a parallel of Computer Associates with Malaysia. We all knew that Honk Kong and Singapore were two Asian Tigers after the second largest economy of the world, Japan. But who knew that so many Asian Tigers are there to follow? Stock of Japan went up already and then

Honk Kong, Singapore and Korea followed and other Tigers followed them. I consider Malaysia was like Computer Associates 25 years ago. Now Malaysia is another Asian Tiger to reckon with. So the strategy is to be small and grow consistently. The value of the stock is bound to go up. When IBM was too expensive, it was time to look for not IBM but future IBM (in this case Computer Associates). In case of a country, it is time to look for next Asian Tiger but there are not many Asian Tigers in South East Asia but there are other Tigers in South Asia. Stock of India already went up and moved up rapidly. So now is the time for investors to look for next Asian stock where investors can participate and make profit. Hopefully it is we, Bangladesh. If we keep on improving and open up to new avenues and Look-East, we could be one unless our government fails to handle the situation. If two major parties do not get it and botch up the prospect, there

should be a third force in the form of civil society organisations that can take charge for the people of Bangladesh. The government is the public agent appointed by people through a democratic process. This is not a country of certain group of people; it is the country of all Bangladeshis. The BNP or Awami League, when in government, represents the whole country not just a party. We have a kind of democracy which is unique because we are not yet civilised enough to trust each other. So we need a caretaker government for now. We are learning and developing economically and politically. Our stock is bound to go up. Investors from East and West are watching and buying slowly. There is a bull run ahead of us. Free economy and Look-East policy of our government will help us to attain our goal.  
**Ekrum Beal**  
*On e-mail*