

## Reporting as university correspondent

**Almost half of the correspondents are from the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, while the rest are from other disciplines. The association has failed to conduct training or workshop on campus reporting. Such a program might be conducted by former members of the association, and would enhance quality reporting and ethical matters.**

KAMRUL HASAN KHAN

ON March 2, 1971, the then Dhaka University Central Student Union vice-president ASM Abdur Rob hoisted the national flag of Bangladesh for the first time atop the arts building of the university. Only a tenderfoot, Muhammad Jahangir, who began journalism in 1969 as a university correspondent for *Dainik Pakistan* (later *Dainik Bangla* in independent Bangladesh), covered the event for his newspaper.

He contributed to the news event on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's historical March 7 speech in 1971.

In independent Bangladesh, Jahangir interviewed Bangabandhu's wife and his younger daughter on the eve of his return to the country on January 10, 1972. Jahangir also interviewed the pilot of the plane that brought Bangabandhu.

Muhammad Jahangir was a "university correspondent," like a good number of others who were, are, and will be here at Dhaka University. Dhaka University Journalists' Association is the body of such correspondents.

All the national newspapers and electronics media usually appoint

one university correspondent on part-time basis. A studentship at the university is the prerequisite for one to be a university correspondent.

### Foundation of the association

Exactly when designated campus reporters began working could not be known, but Mahmud Hasan was university correspondent of the then *Pakistan Observer* (later *Bangladesh Observer*) in the 1950s. Mijanur Rahman Shelly succeeded him in 1961.

At that time, there were a few university correspondents of other newspapers -- AKM Jalaluddin of *Morning News* and Mahbub Talukder of *Dainik Ittefaq*. *Morning News* is now defunct.

Shelly reminisced about his life as a campus reporter in a souvenir of the association, titled "Dateline Dhaka University," that was published in 1989. He said earning extra money was not main attraction of the job. It was beyond that. The job was like an open window to a wide-ranging society and economy that helped them to witness and taste the reality of life while being a student.

To bring about unity, a few campus reporters decided to form an association. On September 19 in 1985, the

Dhaka University Journalists' Association came into being at the Teacher-Student Centre of the university with 13 founding members of the then leading newspapers.

An 11-member executive committee was elected on October 22, 1985, with Harun-ur-Rashid and Rezwanul Haq Raja as president and general secretary, respectively. The office of the association has been furnished with large-screen TV, fax, telephone and other facilities.

### About the incumbents

Many former members who are now holding senior posts at media houses criticise the incumbents, saying that modern communication systems make the correspondents lazier instead of adding speed. They say that there are fewer in-depth special news items than before. Nowadays correspondents are covering politics, crimes and seminars, but not searching for something special.

Zaydul Ahsan Pintu, news coordinator, of *Desh TV*, in a souvenir of the association -- *Punormiloni* (Reunion) 2000 -- said there was no way one could deny the contribution of university correspondents.

But the quality of campus reporting nowadays has deteriorated. There is an indifferent

mood. There are many important news items, but there is lack of effort in looking for them. Only day-to-day events are running.

Pintu said that the association, which was formed to improve the quality of campus reporting, had become an institution. Hopefully, it will do better in the future. But political rivalry in the association is unwanted.

Most of the reporters communicate with each other over mobile phone, and gather at the association just before office hours and share information and ideas. Many times they even determine which part of an event should be focused!

There are always one or two seniors to tell juniors why one particular thing should be given more importance, rather than advising them to develop their own critical senses and follow their own house policy. Some correspondents usually spend their time in the association watching TV and talking over phone.

Syndicate reporting is a catastrophe here. One senior makes a copy of a news item, which is then emailed to other correspondents. The next day you see the same news in almost all the newspapers.

The seniors roam around like political leaders, surrounded by junior correspondents loyal to them. Most of the juniors are labelled by their loyalty to a senior and political leaning, not only as journalists.

These things are making the juniors passive, and preventing them from becoming self-dependant journalists. A number of junior correspondents told us

that they did not want to be like this, but they did not know how they could overcome it.

Recruitment of university correspondents is based on political and regional identity, or loyalty to seniors. Merit is always less important. Media house bosses do not want a member of any reactionary force to intrude into the house, and some are desperate to prevent boys of any other political leanings from joining.

Nowadays, fewer people take up journalism. Power is the main cause for choosing the job. Many believe getting an ID from a newspaper gives you scope to exercise power all over the campus and other places as well.

A number of student leaders told me that they try journalism for some time to enhance their position in the party. I know someone who has managed IDs of more than four yet-to-be-published and local newspapers in a desperate attempt to become a university correspondent. He asked me what else he needed to be a member of the association.

The most significant feature of the association is probably the factional rivalries among the members. It has been an odd characteristic of the association's members. Factions are based on region, political leanings and "promised job." If you promise one junior a better job, he will become loyal to you.

As correspondents reach seniority, they become known for their political leanings -- like pro-BCL, pro-JCD or pro-Shibir, and some as left leaning. Sometimes they are seen to campaign indirectly for their "friends." It is nat-



Education makes a good journalist.

ral that a journalist will also have a political leaning, but it is a concern when his leaning and interests are reflected in his writings.

If one observes the pattern of news about the university, most of the time one would see the same political news. There are few items on education and research works of the university.

Yes, there are few exceptions. Some reporters struggle against the current. They struggle to work independently to become journalists. Many times they are to face hindrances from their very colleagues and seniors, as they are not conformists. Our salute goes to them. But they need to be more active and work hard to see things critically.

Members of the association do not have access to internet, and there is no computer at the association. Although its members will lead the nation in journalism in the coming days, the association has no website and correspondents do not maintain personal blogs.

There is no regular publication of the association. However, the incumbent executive committee has taken up initiative to publish a bimonthly magazine, and says that they will launch a website for the association.

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conduct training or workshop on campus reporting. Such a program might be conducted by former members of the association, and would enhance quality reporting and ethical matters.

Rezwanul Haq Raja, the association's first general secretary, in its first souvenir in 1986 vowed to create a dignified position for campus reporting. He hoped that the association would give birth to pioneers in journalism. Indeed, the association has been doing its duty. Current pioneers in journalism are the proof.

Kamrul Hasan Khan, an MSS student of Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka, worked with The Daily Star as DU Correspondent.

## Can Obama stay above the fray?

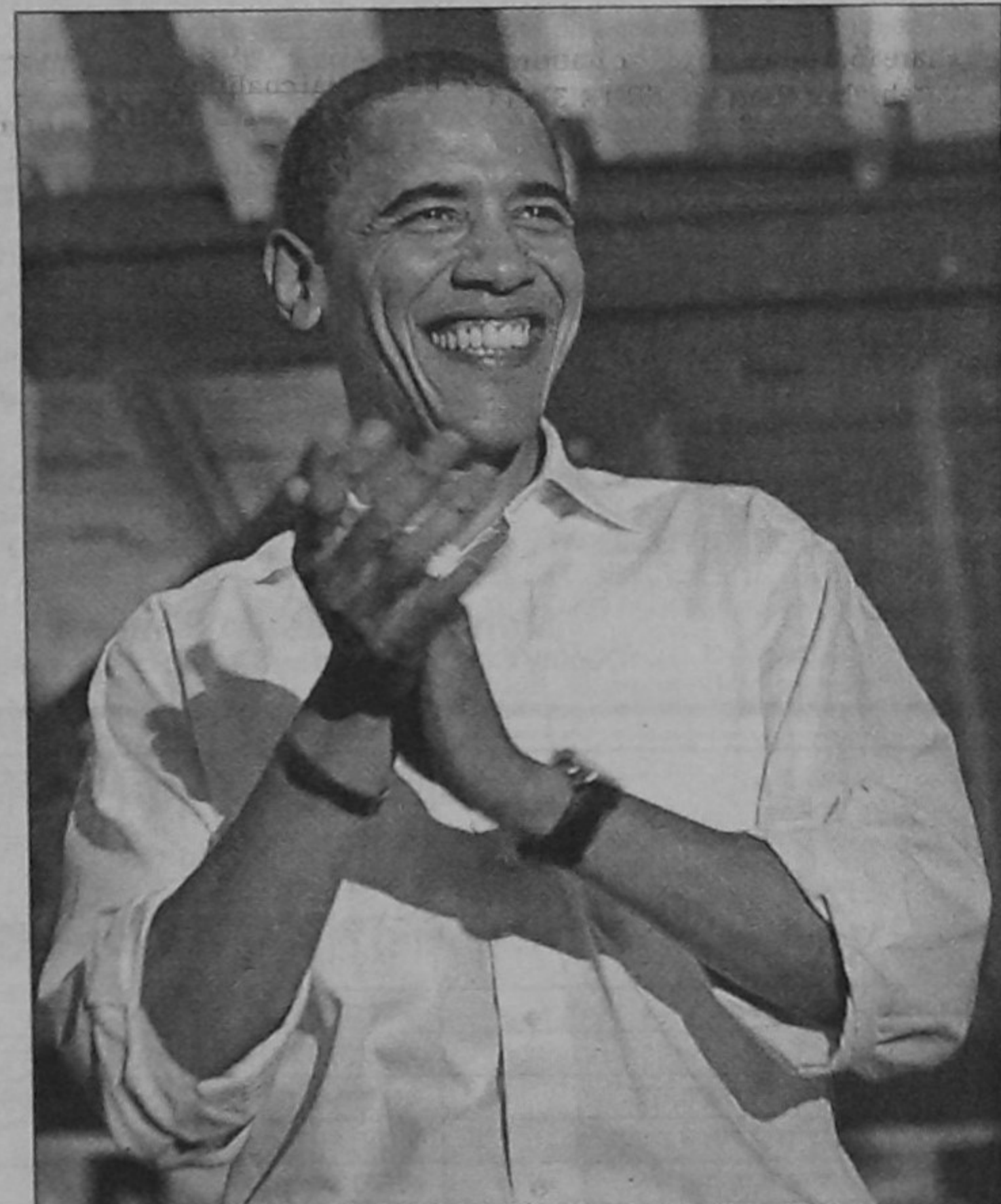
**McCain has zeroed in on the one kernel of truth that can support a web of lies. The Obama people can say they're a transformative campaign, but at some point they have to deal with reality, however distasteful. The old politics is alive and well.**

ELEANOR CLIFT

THE Obama campaign is almost Zen-like in its serenity, brushing aside a series of negative attacks as outmoded expressions of old politics, charting its own timetable in choosing a running mate, dismissing worries about being overshadowed by the Olympics as outmoded.

Delaying the vice-presidential announcement doesn't matter, except to political reporters planning their vacations, but the eerie calm emanating from Chicago about the story line advanced by the McCain campaign has Democrats worried that once again their candidate will be stereotyped as a self-absorbed elitist.

The same people who brought you the windsurfing, French-speaking John Kerry are likening Barack Obama to Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, so taken with his celebrity that he declined to visit wounded American soldiers recuperating at an Army hospital in Germany when he couldn't bring along his media entourage. The story is untrue, as is the ad the McCain campaign quickly whipped up. The Washington Post found "no evidence at all" for the accusation.



Not stooping to conquer.

Facts won't stop the McCain people any more than they stopped Karl Rove and the Bush crowd in 2004. The Swift Boat

attacks showed it doesn't take facts to get a negative message into the political bloodstream. You can have a huge impact

with relatively little money. The more ridiculous the charge -- Obama is to blame for high gas prices, Obama is Paris Hilton in drag, Obama disses troops to go to the gym -- the more free air time you get from a toothless media watchdog.

Republicans, worried that their September convention would look pale, male and stale after Obama's rock-star performance in Denver, decided to do a Rove -- go straight at your opponent's strength and turn his rock-star status into a negative.

The combination of huge adoring crowds in Berlin, a missed visit to the troops and a truncated quote taken out of context form the lethal weapon. "This is the moment... that the world is waiting for," adding "I have become a symbol of the possibility of America returning to our best traditions."

Republicans jumped on the remark as presumptuous. The McCain campaign calls him "The One," and comic Jon Stewart said when Obama was in the Mid-East he stopped by the manger in Bethlehem to visit his birthplace.

Similarly mocking characterisations helped do in Kerry -- and before him, Al Gore, who never said he invented the internet or discovered Love Canal -- but the images stuck because they fit the easy caricature. And the caricature is starting to put a frame on Obama -- the biggest celebrity in the world -- an out-of-touch elitist

who thinks he's already won the election.

Earlier attacks that Obama was really a darling of lobbyists, or that he was borrowing speeches from campaign co-chair Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, didn't stick because they didn't fit what voters think they know about Obama, that he raises money by the fistfuls over the internet and he's an accomplished orator and writer.

McCain has zeroed in on the one kernel of truth that can support a web of lies. The Obama people can say they're a transformative campaign, but at some point they have to deal with reality, however distasteful.

The old politics is alive and well. If Obama acts like he's above it, he fuels the fire. If he answers in kind, he risks damaging his brand as a new kind of politician. It's the same box he was in during the primaries with Hillary Clinton.

Saying this is a new era, that it's not your grandfather's electorate, that the issues of war and energy independence and economic stress trump the old-guard tactic of character destruction may be true -- but why take the chance? "There are lots of ways these things become viral, and this is the Ebola virus of 2008," warns Matt Bennett, cofounder of Third Way, a centrist Democratic group. "I think his guys are brilliant; they'd better take steps to inoculate him."

The campaign fell into a similar trap when Obama made his trium-

phal march from the Iowa caucuses to New Hampshire. Thousands crowded into his big iconic rallies while Hillary held town meetings, taking questions and engaging the voters.

The polls showed Obama with a big lead, but the voters didn't like being told the race was over. The pattern repeated itself in other primary contests. Every time Obama acted like the presumptive nominee, Hillary would rear up and reassert herself.

Moving his acceptance speech into the stadium where the Denver Broncos play will be the high point of the Democratic National Convention. But once the fall campaign unfolds, there will likely be fewer stadium blow-outs.

As one Democratic strategist put it: "When you're swimming with sharks, you don't cut your finger." Obama has signaled outside groups on the progressive side to stand down, that he wants to control the message, and he has the money to fight on all fronts.

Democrats are nervous that the Zen-like demeanor of the campaign is naive, but maybe it's just a way of calming everybody down. By not reacting to every groundless attack, Obama could be leading us into the new politics he promised. Or he could just be a easier target to hit.

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## The butler didn't do it, the fish did

POLICE in the US are investigating a possible case of conspiracy to murder by fish. No, the fish didn't have a gun, nor did anyone hit anyone with a soggy fillet. Suspicious activity by a man ordering Japanese fugu -- highly poisonous puffer fish -- is at the root of the case.

Now fugu is similar to infamous deadly American foods such as "burger and fries," but it kills you faster (slightly). Unless a specially trained chef cuts out the fugu's liver and other bits, the consumer ends up as dead as his dinner. Every year, several Japanese seafood lovers eat themselves to death (which I must admit, as a seafood lover, sounds like a nice way to go.)

But scientists in Nagasaki made an interesting discovery. "We believe that puffer fish acquire poison by eating poisonous food, such as starfish and shellfish, rather than producing it themselves. So we fed them non-poisonous food," a scientist told the press. The result: poison-free fugu.

Fugu-fans scoffed at this by saying they won't scoff it. "Non-toxic fugu is boring. Fugu is exciting because it's toxic," restaurateur Takeshi Yamasuge said.

But what gourmet would be able to resist a dish made of fugu liver -- the part that usually can only be tasted once, since it causes speedy death?

The scientists argue that there will be a big market, arguing that a significant number of people haven't tried fugu because they don't fancy eating one of the world's deadliest poisons. Strange, that.

Staying with the seafood theme, scientists on the beaches of Panglao island in the Philippines found rocks which appear to move around on their own. The creatures

look like they are made of stone, but are believed to be a hitherto unknown species of crab.

"It looks like a piece of rock. Then you turn it to the other side and you see the legs, the eyes, the mouth," a scientist, told the AFP newswire. He believes there are dozens of strange and bizarre species of life in the Philippines. Unfortunately, most of them go into politics.

The whole Asian seafood scene is a lively one.

I once read about a fish in Indonesia who exacted a dramatic revenge on a fisherman who was in the habit of crushing the heads of live fish with his teeth. As Marjono, 34, lowered the gabus fish towards his mouth, it wriggled out of his hand and jumped down his throat. The man died of suffocation in Central Java, the Jakarta Post reported.

And then there was the fisherman in Malaysia who was attacked by a swordfish. It leapt out of the water, stabbed him in the heart, and then leapt back into the sea, leaving him to bleed to death.

What does all this prove? It looks to me like the seafood has decided to take revenge against humanity after centuries of abuse.

Worst of all was the case of the man in Taiwan who had a live baby octopus on his plate. He popped the beast into his mouth whole. The aggrieved creature spread itself out inside the man's mouth and choked him to death -- and survived the experience.

How embarrassing for a human to get into a battle-to-the-death with a small seafood appetizer and lose. How would he ever again show his face at the fugu shop?

Visit our columnist's website and die laughing (or of boredom): [www.vittachi.com](http://www.vittachi.com)

## A new phase in Cambodian politics

**The two major challenges the CPP cabinet will have is to employ all their talents and their collective to address the endemic corruption and to enhance good governance. In particular, there is a growing demand from the Cambodian people themselves for the tabling of a comprehensive Anti-Corruption Bill.**

VERGHESE MATHEWS

IF there was anything absolutely certain about the fourth Cambodian general elections on July 27, it was that the ruling Cambodian People's Party was poised to win handsomely. This was an accepted certainty well before the split between Cambodia and Thailand over Preah Vihear temple.

Official results are awaited but the unofficial polls count suggest that the CPP has done better than initially expected and may well have won more than two-thirds of the 123 seats contested by the eleven political parties. If it crosses the two-thirds mark, it will be the first time ever since the landmark 1991 Paris Peace Agreement that a single party has achieved such success.

The CPP, which began as a communist party following the Khmer Rouge overthrow in 1979, would

have very good reason to celebrate. This election has also seen much less violence than the last three elections in 1993, 1998, and 2003 -- which is a good enough reason for everyone and the neighbourhood to rejoice.

Even if the two-thirds is denied to the CPP, there is still reason for celebration, as it will be the first time since 1991 that a single party has taken control of the government in general election.

Previously, a party had to secure two-thirds of the seats to form government and no party was able to do so. This led to the formation of a fractious coalition after each of the previous elections between the CPP and the royalist Funcinpec party led by Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

Following the last elections in which the CPP scored 73 seats, the formation of the coalition with Funcinpec (26 seats) took a year --

seen by many as a debilitating and wasteful year.

It is different this time around. The Constitution was amended with the support of the opposition to allow any party that obtained more than 50% of the seats to form government. While there was no doubt then that the CPP would form the next government, the party did not take this for granted. More importantly, it had no delusions -- they knew they were not universally liked in Cambodia, and that the opposition and the royalist parties had good people with good ideas and with significant support in the country.

The CPP addressed the obvious challenges by ensuring that its parliamentarians and workers were in the field, in their constituencies and in the opposition constituencies, day in and day out, listening to the rural folk, rebutting opposition claims or explaining government

action. The CPP badly wanted to rule by itself, having decided after the last elections that it would no longer waste a year negotiating a coalition government.

But much of the credit for CPP's success must go to the collective CPP leadership in running a tight ship on one hand and delivering roads, irrigation canals, schools and clinics across the country on the other. Above all, there was a prevailing sense of stability in a country that had shed so much blood and so many tears.

In that context, there can be no denying that Prime Minister Hun Sen was pivotal in CPP's success; the 2008 General Elections is in particular, Hun Sen's personal success story.

While it may now appear that Hun Sen has stamped his authority over the CPP, it is more complex than that. Although he is now more powerful than at any time before within his party, the reality is that he is not all that powerful. He will be -- but not just yet.

Some things will have to be handled gingerly. Hun Sen will have to negotiate with the CPP leadership on the cabinet appointments. Given the CPP's track

record, much of the horse-trading would already have been worked out -- it will be the fine-tuning now and that is where sensitivities lie.

If anyone knows power play in Cambodia, it is Hun Sen and former King Norodom Sihanouk. There is also a strategic question on the table -- whether or not to reach out to Funcinpec despite its poor showing, though there is no need for a coalition.

Better to have some of the losers in the tent theory! The greater problem for Hun Sen in the cabinet line-up is to persuade some of the old faithful to retire and infuse the cabinet with fresh blood, and in any country this must be handled delicately.

Hun Sen may not be able to achieve this in the forthcoming cabinet, but he can be expected to set the pace to do so the next time.

A Hun Sen quality that is often overlooked by the media is that for several years, now Hun Sen has been able to surround himself with a group of young officials who are all well-educated, committed, competent and hardworking.

They prepare papers, head committees, negotiate with foreign governments and organisations and

provide leadership. Several are heading major institutions and ministries. Some will gradually move to cabinet. If Hun Sen had his way, he would accelerate the process.

Challenges lie ahead for the new CPP government. One-third of the population still live below the poverty level in a country that will have oil on-stream in 2011. More youths are entering the employment market and these are potential opposition voters if they continue to remain unemployed. But these are perennial challenges.

The two major challenges the CPP cabinet will have is to employ all their talents and their collective to address the endemic corruption and to enhance good governance. In particular, there is a growing demand from the Cambodian people themselves for the tabling of a comprehensive Anti-Corruption Bill.

When the bill is passed in parliament it would be a significant start and another reason to celebrate. In the meantime, Cambodia remains the unsung success story of Asean.

Vergheese Mathews, the Singapore High Commissioner to Bangladesh, was a former Ambassador in Cambodia.