

Gateway to Economic, Commercial and Technical Success

by AKM Hedayetul Haq

JAPAN'S miraculous success in the last four decades have taken the world so much by storm that Japanology has become a thriving phenomenon. Even those powers that in the early twentieth century felt contemptuous of the yellow peril and were apt to condescend to the rising power of the East, at first felt apathy, then wondered at the speed at which Japan picked up the momentum after the destruction, dislocation and set-back of the Second World War. With further progress and achievement of Japan, the wonder turned into admiration and when Japan was about to overtake them by a wide margin, the admiration turned into jealousy which culminated in cut-throat competition for supremacy and confrontation for survival. The spectacular growth of Japan led to innumerable studies to find out the reasons for such phenomenal success. Scholars, academicians, research specialists, politicians and journalists descended in hordes to discover the mysteries that brought about such a stupendous economic miracle in the country.

'Japanophiles' and the other, who found much too anomalies and discrimination beneath the carpet and are known as the revisionists. Both these schools of thought professed to be objective in their method and goal. Recently, there is also another school coming up who are called post-revisionists. In any case, the interest in Japan is growing by leaps and bounds not only amongst the intelligentsia but also the political and economic interests of the world. Foreign dignitaries are too ready to visit Japan and their motive in this is to share a pie of the Japanese largesse and Japanese technology to catapult them to the desired place.

Rooted in Culture

Negotiation with the Japanese is the gateway to their economic, commercial and technical world and calls for hard work and patience. The Japanese regard negotiation with a seriousness that has been perfected into an art and science at the same time. Their sense of discipline is rooted more in their culture and is indirect. They collect all possible information, statistics and data not only on the subject of negotiation but also on the negotiators themselves. Every nuance of their personal hobbies, past career and role is carefully analysed beforehand. Negotiations in Japan take place in the separate conference room and never in the office of a company executive. The room is quiet and free from telephone or noise. There is silence throughout. The seating arrangements are

made beforehand. The heads of the team sit in the middle of the opposite tables flanked by other members, with some at the back. After exchange of greetings expressed in bows of various depths according to the status of persons, photographs are taken. Then the parties get down to business. The position of each side is stated and discussions start. That Japanese generally adopt what is known as case by case or step by step approach. It is rare for them to jump to conclusions or generalise easily. Direct and pointed questions are usually avoided. Indirect method predominates in discussion and harmony and consensus is aimed at. Clarifications and queries are made on the subject of discussion. Frequent consultations are whispered by the advisers into the ears of the team leaders. Copious notes are taken and pocket calculators come into full play. Almost every Japanese employee invariably carries a personal calculator, a slip pad and a ball point pen in his pocket.

Saving face is one of the principle traits in Japanese culture and therefore utmost care is taken not to lose it at the conference table. Therefore, confrontation is avoided in any discussion to create an atmosphere of harmony and understanding. Aggressive talk, sarcastic remarks or sharp tones usually do not gain favour in the eyes of the Japanese. They remain very calm, unruffled and composed during discussion. Cross talk is rare.

If one carefully watches the body language of the Japanese negotiators, nothing would be

visible from looking into their eyes. One in bound to encounter expressionless faces. In Japan, there are two significant words called 'Tatemaye' and 'Honne'. 'Tatemaye' is formal, idealistic and for public stance. 'Honne' is informal, realistic and for what would really happen. There is another word called 'Nemawashi' which implies background work and all that it means. One should also look for indirect reference and ambivalent nuances to draw their conclusions. One Japanologist humorously said that there are nineteen ways of saying 'no'. Choice of expressions and their analysis also produce interesting results. There can be a number of responses to a proposal, like this — 1) 'We will see'. 2) 'This will have to be examined'. 3) 'We will examine'. 4) 'We will consult our authorities and let you know'. 5) 'We cannot tell you how — it would take time to examine'.

Listening to Others

Unlike many others, Japanese are by nature taciturn people and it is more so in negotiations where they allow the other side to speak out, listening to them carefully and taking notes. Interruptions are considered bad form. They like frankness in discussion and are apt to be wary of those who want to show off or try to score a point in discussion. It is as if by instinct they can touch the main issue and find out the answer.

Japanese society is still a male dominated one and the

number of women in business, industry and administration in the higher echelon is short of expectation. Therefore, one does not find many Japanese women at the negotiating table — except perhaps for secretarial services and mostly for serving refreshments. Tea/coffee breaks take place in negotiation to allow the parties time for personal report and intimate man-to-man discussion. It is a frequent sight to see the two team leaders in a corner to be engaged in exchanging ideas and resolving issues during such breaks. Parties and receptions are thrown by both sides during the negotiations to enable them for a relaxed and informal discussion. Such occasions are very lavish and no effort is spared to make the guests happy. These help to break the monotony of discussion as well as remove obstacles in reaching consensus. The parties/receptions are mostly stag, although one sometimes notices a sprinkling of women. It has been aptly said that Japanese are possibly the best-dressed people in the world and they are more so in pin-stripes and immaculate dark suits in such parties. The spruce attire and the clean look of the Japanese businessmen has become the envy of many in the West. Western writers frequently jibe at expensive and custom tailored dress of the Japanese elite.

Hopeful Indications

There are always pre-conditions of negotiations and unless there are hopeful indications, parties are not called for negotiations. The Japanese ensure that their negotiations end in agreement. The failure

rate at negotiating table is very low. It has been said that although negotiations take time, effort and patience with the Japanese, once an agreement is reached and signed, it becomes a sacred document and is acted upon faithfully. An agreement is always followed up by the exchange of gifts. Few nations can excel the Japanese in this. Gifts are carefully chosen, depending on the likes and tastes of the other side; these are carefully and artistically packed and wrapped and their cute look is bound to draw admiration.

It would suffice to say here that 'negotiation' to the Japanese is not only a means but also very nearly an end, since this is a prelude to establishing formal relations and commitment from one side to the other and vice versa. They want stable and steady fulfillment of contracts and desire to maintain the relations over the long term, showing understanding and loyalty to the partner. It is because of this that there are not many fly-by-night companies in Japan. Japanese style of negotiation is their own and is steeped in their own culture and firmly rooted in their own destiny and sense of direction. The main spirit and strength of it lies in their belief, faith and confidence in themselves. That is why it could not be aped or duplicated over the years by academicians or professionals from the overseas. Unable to grasp it in its totality, they are apt to call it the 'Japanese enigma', perhaps.

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City Crimes

There has been a sharp rise in city crimes during the last few months. Crimes such as street side theft, attack on women, assault, extortion of money have all gone towards making Dhaka quite an unsafe place to live in. The crimes, most of which start out to be petty crimes, become violent in no time as the criminals do not hesitate in using firearms at the slightest resistance by the victims. A most disturbing aspect of this rise in city crimes is that a large part of it seems to be directed against the women. The tradition of our women folk wearing gold ornaments make them attractive targets. The fact that women are not known to resist attack by criminals appear to give the criminals a sense of impunity in carrying out crimes against them. The rise in the number of working women, larger number of women attending colleges and universities and more and more housewives doing their own shopping as never before, have all added to a large number of women being out on the streets, making for a larger target for the criminals.

Archaic laws, outmoded system of apprehending criminals, cumbersome method of suspect identification and the lack of security for those who come out to help the police to fight the criminals have all added to a general hindrance on the part of the general public to report crimes, seek assistance of the police and to follow the judicial process through to the end. Added to this, our general apathy towards resorting to legal action, especially in view of the fact that it takes an inordinately long time to come to bear any result, has created a sense of helplessness in fighting the rising tide of crime. The propensity of the criminals to shoot to kill any victim that dare to make the slightest attempt to resist has no doubt added an element of fear in the mind of the citizens who prefer to suffer silently than to crusade against this situation.

The question that is in everybody's mind is what we can do against this rise in crimes. The foremost responsibility of course lies with the police. There is no denying the fact that police has so far been able to only scratch the surface as far as eliminating crimes from the city streets is concerned. Much has been written about police efficiency — or the lack of it — in dealing with city crimes. The corruption within the law enforcement body, which is neither a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to Bangladesh, has added to the general scepticism about the effectiveness of our police in controlling crimes in the national capital. What has made the crime scene in Dhaka more dangerous is the widespread availability of firearms. Some of them are produced locally. It is now well known that most of the criminals are urban youths, some of them educated. Many have been reported to provide muscle power of political parties. They lend support to their party of 'choice' and indulge in crimes for added booty. This reported link between party armed cadres and the criminal underworld—not so under, if you come to think of it— is an ominous development with very far reaching consequences.

However trite and platitudinous it may sound, we must do everything in our power to fight this rising trend of city crimes. The police must be geared to tackle this changing situation. For this purpose expanding the police force, giving them modern training and providing better communication facilities should be seriously looked into. There is a general doubt in the public mind about the efficacy of our police force. This lack of faith further alienates the police from the public and prevents the type of cooperation between them from coming about that we so seriously need.

A coordinated move by the police with active participation of the public must be organised to stem this tide of crime in the city. Let us not underestimate the enormity nor the urgency of the task at hand.

The Death of Punch

When a journal has been in circulation for some 150 years, one can safely assume that it has been read by at least four generations. Again, when the journal happens to be Punch, Britain's well-known satirical magazine, its readership covers the entire English-speaking world. You can see old copies of the journal lying around in the lounge of the Strand hotel in Yangon, in the otherwise depressing waiting room of a dentist in a suburb of London or, for that matter, among the old books and periodicals left behind by the last English manager of a tea garden in Srimangal.

Soon, our words of appreciation for Punch should be in past tense. According to the latest report, Punch is now on its death-bed, all set to publish its final issue on April 8. If it is on April 1, we would not have believed the report. Punch has as much right to play an April Fool's Joke on the world as any other publication.

It seems, Punch is the victim of the changes which have taken place in the media world, more in the industrialised West and Japan than in developing countries. The rising cost of production, the continuing decline in the revenue from advertisers who are now increasingly attracted to colour supplements and the electronic media and perhaps — and this is purely our guess — drop in the number of writers dabbling in satires have left Punch in its predicament, facing a closure instead of another 150 years in circulation.

What is happening to Punch can happen to other low-cost periodicals — it will be ominous to name them — which, for many decades, have shaped the thinking, standards and values of millions of the educated elite in all parts of the world. The irony of it all is that when big media empires can generate billions to satisfy their acquisitive appetite, Punch cannot meet its deficit of a mere £1 million a year. Can anything be worse than the so-called world of free media?

Foreign interest in Japan is evidenced by the publication of over 500 books per year, not to mention of innumerable articles, research papers and dissertations on the growth and development of Japanese industry, finance, commerce, investment as well as the hidden meaning and nuances of Japanese national traits and culture. The interest led to two schools of thought among the pundits in the West — one that was taken in by the success and charm of Japan's growth and development, and is popularly called the

Women Again Left Out as Kuwait Prepares for Polls

Mohammed Aslam writes from Dubai

In the Kuwaiti elections scheduled for October only men of 21 years and over who can trace their family presence in the country before 1920 are eligible to vote. No woman will be registered. In January the government lifted Press censorship, imposed in 1986 when the parliament was dissolved. But legal curbs on the media still exist and the right to assembly remains restricted. The campaigning has been marked by anxieties on the part of both government and opposition.



THE EMIR OF KUWAIT
Dilemma of democracy

KUWAIT has started the process of parliamentary elections scheduled for October. The government is eager to avoid any cause of complaint and the opposition is keen to make the exercise as democratic as possible in the newly liberated country's circumstances.

Registration of voters started on February 1. Informal political groups are seeking a popular mandate for a representative government, although no intention is expressed to oppose the rule of the Sabah family as such.

The elections were promised by the Emir, Sheikh Jaber Al Sabah, during his exile in Saudi Arabia forced by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. He set polling for October after the United States-led forces drove out the Iraqis.

Both government and opposition groups are anxious about the campaigning. Ordinary Kuwaitis are still trying to come to grips with the aftermath of the traumatic seven-month Iraqi occupation.

The government, headed by Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Saad Al Sabah, says it is determined to conduct the polls in a manner that does not give anyone any chance to boycott them, as happened in June 1990.

That was when the government, under intense pressure from pro-democracy activists to restore the last democratically-elected parliament dissolved in 1986, organised polls for 50 seats of an interim council that was to include 25 members nominated by the Emir.

The opposition boycotted the elections, saying that, without democratic rules governing them and without mandatory legislative powers, the council would be 'toothless'.

The partially-elected council was revived after the liberation, but the opposition did not rest until the October polls were announced. Even

In fact, the Emir had acknowledged their role in the war against Iraq and the Crown Prince promised a suitable opportunity for them in the rebuilding process.

The government has kept women out of the political reckoning probably in deference to the wishes of the traditionalists and opposition by conservative hard-liners who still wield considerable influence.

Specifically, the authorities have unexpectedly refrained from altering the geographical or demographic parameters of electoral zones. Any change on this score would have led to the charge of manipulation.

Thus, the 25 election districts are the same as for the 1985 polls, with each constituency sending two representatives to the 50-member Parliament.

'We are not going to change anything that would give the various political groups in this country an excuse to boycott the election,' the Interior Minister was quoted as saying. And that includes barring women.

Similarly, in January the government lifted direct Press censorship, imposed in 1986 when the parliament was dissolved, in response to opposition demands for freedom of expression during campaigning. But legal curbs on the media still exist and the right to assembly remains severely restricted.

The government also seems to have neutralised some Kuwaiti intellectuals' attempt to involve foreign experts in

the election process by seeking lobbying and campaign advice from them. Kuwait University's Graduate Society was reported to be in touch with the Washington-based Republican Institute for International Affairs.

A move to ask external observers to monitor the polls was ruled out. 'It is out of the question,' the Kuwaiti news Agency (KUNA) quoted Justice Minister Ghazi Obeid Al Sammar as saying.

He stressed the purely internal nature of this issue and expressed certainty that the honourable citizens are fully aware of the fairness of the judicial system,' the state-run KUNA reported.

It referred to a network of committees, supervised by a judge or public prosecutor, that would be responsible for organising the vote in each electoral district.

The political groups, for their part, have already started wooing voters by holding the Dhwani sessions — traditional social gatherings at prominent citizens' homes — at which political and other election issues are discussed.

The need for the administration to be more reflective of the people's aspirations and the ministers to be accountable to elected representatives is a common subject of discussions.

The opposition is anxious to play on this theme in an attempt to attract sympathy on the basis of the common man's bitter experience during the Iraqi occupation and the authorities' inability to cope with

the challenge without outside help.

The government, evidently upset by the echo in such suggestions of the legislators' criticism of the performance of key ministers that led to the assembly's dissolution six years ago, accuses the opposition of ignoring the leadership's achievement.

The government has emphasised its financial help to Kuwaiti citizens during the occupation and after the war. Consumer loans worth billions

of dollars have been written off. Billions more have been spent on rehabilitation and restoration of public services or given out as compensation.

The opposition appears to be undaunted. A typical comment came from Ahmed Baqer, head of the radical Islamic Alliance: 'I think people will take and ask for more. They appreciate more money but still want Parliament'.

More than 500 men have already declared their intention to contest the polls. The number of voters is expected to be 92,000 against 60,000 in 1985. The population of Kuwait is 650,000. An estimated 60 per cent are under the voting age. Registered voters thus represent only a small percentage of all Kuwaitis. — GEMINI NEWS

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To the Editor...

DCC and responsibilities

Sir, When the Dhaka Municipal Corporation was reconstituted as the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the city dwellers hoped that a plenty of positive changes were going to occur in the organisation having obvious impact on the lives of the citizens.

Nothing has changed as regards the method of disposal of garbage. Garbage vans ply through the city roads during daytime compelling the citizens to breathe unhealthy hellish odours. The citizens feel that garbage vans can be used to do the task of collection and disposal of garbage

before citizens come out to go to their workplaces.

The indifference, inefficiency and incompetence of the DCC has been confirmed beyond any doubt as the mosquito menace reached its climax. Many fervent appeals were made to the Mayor through the letters column of the newspapers to do something to annihilate the mosquitoes. At one stage, the public in general were assured that they (DCC) were going to eliminate the mosquitoes in a week. But, the citizens did not see the DCC people to get down into practical or pragmatic actions. Thank mother nature as the mosquitoes are decreasing in number due to breeding constraints and their short life-span.

Another thing the city fathers overlook is the poor condition of the city roads, lanes and by-lanes here and there threatening hygienic living and also at the same time tarnishing the charm of a

capital city. Roads have been cut for installing gas or water pipes, but these have been left without repair or reconstruction. These pose a number of hazards to the passers-by. This is due to lack of coordination among DCC, WASA, and Titas Gas Authority. This was pointed out on several occasions by the press and needs immediate attention of the concerned authorities.

We feel that the Mayor of the Dhaka City should be a man of word like his peers in other countries. Despite the prevailing dismal condition of the citizens, may we expect the DCC in collaboration and coordination with WASA and Gas Authority will rise to the demand of the time to resolve the aforesaid contentions namely collection and disposal of garbage, and repairing and maintenance of roads, lanes and by-lanes.

A M Sayed Khan
Farashganj, Dhaka.

Schools in low-lying areas

Sir, The previous government promised to make all the schools and colleges in the low-lying areas of the country pucca. But only a few schools could be turned into pucca buildings so far. Some schools made pucca with only 4/5 rooms simply inadequate for holding classes. The multistoried buildings thus made are also not safe for the children as the balcony railings are very low in height.

We want that all the schools in low-lying areas all over Bangladesh be made pucca and the multistoried buildings safe for children. The benign government may please start construction at the earliest.

M A Motin Majumder
Survey of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

OPINION Whither Reason?

A Mawaz

Genuine madness, may be pathological, therefore predictable. But when there is a method in the madness, the operation is suspect, and calls for probe.

The nation has been witnessing a spate of demands and counter demands from various unions and groups for pay-hikes and other service conditions. In all the three sectors — public, private, and semi-autonomous. The main motivation appears to be the sense of euphoria released after the general elections last year, subsequent to the de-throning of the 9-year old autocratic regime.

Going further into the motivations, certain trends may be noticed: (a) Imitation — 'They have got it, so let us try'. One off-shoot is the egotism of the group leaders — to get popular, and display that they could also do it; (b) vested interests working behind the movements, which might be at the political level, or anti-national (with involvement of foreign interests).

These agitations have moved from one sector to another, viz. the civil service, transport, mills, factories, and the industry, banks, airways, police, the essential services, etc. The virus has now entered the Dhaka City Corporation.

Apart from the harkals for better service conditions, a different type of lawlessness is sapping the energy of the nation: the unrest in the academic institutions, involving the students in violence, resulting in the closure of the higher institutions of learning.

Hence, there might be reasons to believe that the 'madness' appears to be planned, to create certain conditions, and achieve certain objectives, desirable or otherwise. Who are playing this game, and why? We hear different versions, either in defence or in accusation.

Coming back to pay-hikes and associated demands, it is

not realised by the agitators that increased take-home cash is quite different from changing service rules and conditions under duress, group pressure; or, in a hurry. Such arbitrary action (the latter) threatens to strain or break down the administration, which no sane citizen could support.

To put a curb on unreasonable demands, the group leaders need training and orientation courses. They use the group supporters (members) as puppets and as leverage, and hold the nation at ransom. Unreasonable demands and agitations which tend to harm national interest are obviously anti-national, and there should be no hesitation in declaring such propagators as unpatriotic. They should be made to face the laws of the country, and taken to court for judgement. If there are loop-holes in the law, these should be corrected, to protect a young nation struggling to get on its feet.

There should be a limit to appeasement from all quarters. It is a pity that our Opposition is powerful in number, but weak in principle, and tend to patronise cheap popular tactics, and are weak-kneed when it comes to denouncing the wrong agitations. Silence under such circumstances is appeasement of wrong causes or methods. Sometimes the cause may be right, but the method may be wrong. The latter is not condemned by the influential parties. We want (or wanted) democracy, we have voted for the MPs, and the natural feeling arises that the electorate are being let down by the elected representatives. If it is not so, then our leaders have not been able to explain themselves to the public. Sermons have no meaning unless these are understood and accepted by the people.

It is high time to rise above the party interest.