

## Career voyage

Job satisfaction depends on a plethora of factors, the main factor being how as a worker I can fulfill my physiological, safety, social and self-esteem needs as has been espoused by the great American psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow. Money is a small player for meeting Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.

MASWOOD ALAM KHAN

Job satisfaction is the key to job performance. A cause and effect relationship does not always exist between job satisfaction and performance, though the two are closely related. Just because two things are related doesn't mean that one causes the other.

Job satisfaction depends on a plethora of factors, the main factor being how as a worker I can fulfill my physiological, safety, social and self-esteem needs as has been espoused by the great American psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow. Money is a small player for meeting Maslow's hierarchy of human needs.

If I am satisfied and happy in my work, I will perform better than someone who is not happy at work.

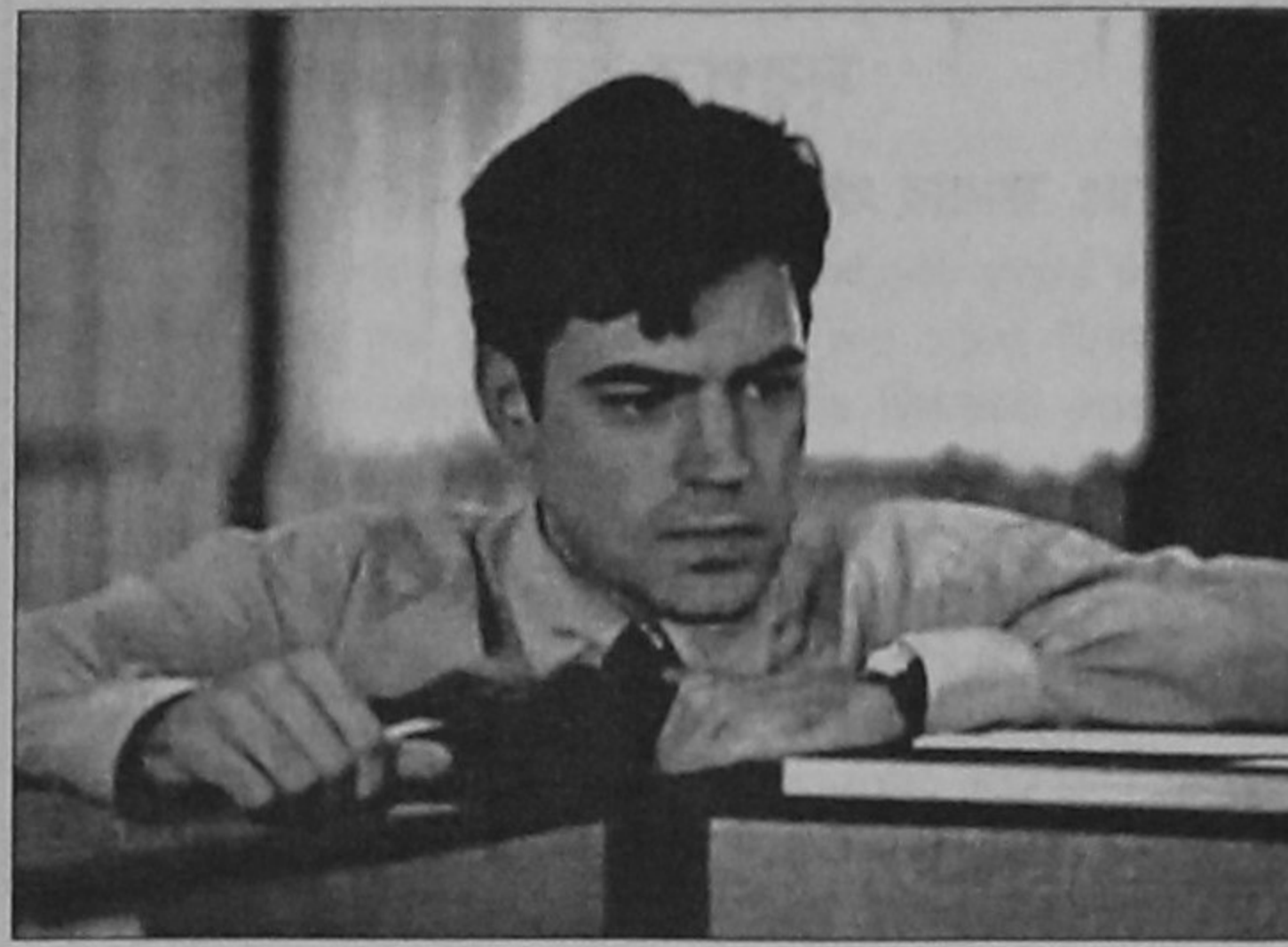
Even if I am satisfied and happy with my work, my performance may also deteriorate if my bosses are not happy in their interpersonal relationships. I may also lose interest if I ever come to know that the products the factory I am working in is producing are not as valuable to humans as those produced by a factory where my friend works.

I am ready to work for a lesser pay if I can boast about my company as to their reputation in the business world, a very sensitive factor affecting our egoistic satisfaction -- a factor that propelled Mother Teresa into dedicating her entire life as a spinster for the service of the hapless in India thousands of miles away from her home in Poland.

During a recent session meant for our bank's probationary officers where I was giving a lecture on

performing and non-performing assets, I stole some moments to infuse into the young minds of the trainees a dose of zeal and inspiration so that they feel proud of Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB), the largest partner of the government for agricultural development of our country.

BKB is the very bank, I told them, that played the most pivotal role back in the year 1977 in infusing collateral-free micro-loans in our rural areas under "Taka 100 Crore Special Agricultural Credit Program" which was in fact the vaccine against the future poverty of Bangladesh -- a vaccine that salvaged our country from a bleak future. Absence of that vaccine would have made today's Bangladesh much more devastated than today's Ethiopia by a level of poverty which could be much more



Are you satisfied with your job?

dearly than pandemic smallpox.

In the course of my lecture to the probationary officers what I wanted to impress upon them is: "No matter how humble its outlets are and no matter how unassuming its annual financial report is, BKB is the flagship in the battle against the poverty of our country and working for such a righteous organisation should be viewed as a sacred mission, a philanthropic assignment neither a

man greedy for money nor a woman hungry for posh interior of an office is suitable for."

Our exhortations for the young probationers' developing a sense of belongingness with the bank seemed to have worked well as in the certificate awarding ceremony we heard a lady probationary officer named Shukti open her heart to declare: "It is our poor tax payers' money we used to earn our higher education

from colleges and universities. No organisation can be better than Bangladesh Krishi Bank where our service benefiting agricultural farmers can at least partially compensate for our debts to taxpayers. I on behalf of all the probationers hereby pledge our wholehearted commitments that we will live up to your total expectations." Bemused at her candid expression of gratitude the whole crowd inside the auditorium cheered and clapped in unison.

In Bangladesh the concept that every graduate should have opportunities to apply their earned knowledge in suitable fields has never been given credence. Career planning has been deemed a low priority and job markets short of enough vacancies have been frustrating young people who are found floundering helplessly not knowing where to find their stations. Nevertheless, many of our youngsters have also been successful careerists.

If you are a fresh graduate you must think about a career; earlier you start thinking about what you'd enjoy, the better off you'll be. Learn good speaking and

writing skills in both Bangla and English and take courses in computer science to supplement your basic discipline. Leave no road unexplored. In today's world, there are never any guarantees, but some careful planning at the beginning of your career hunting may help lead you to a more secure future.

We have observed that it is always the mediocre talents who do well in their jobs like in a bank or in a corporation. Extraordinarily talented students mysteriously slip over on the rugged pathways of business offices though they excel in the fields of academia.

Geniuses throughout their academic careers chased for the best trophies in their classrooms, a passion they also try to rashly pursue in jobs only to find themselves skidded out in the race and they are more apt to hop from one job to another landing ultimately themselves an inglorious finality in their career paths. Job hopping, though a fad in the West, does not necessarily bring good results in our country as job avenues are extremely limited and the possibility of finding a

suitable job is rare, especially for a novice without experience. A majority of job-holders are "square pegs in round holes."

On the other hand, mediocre students are not extremely ambitious; they are usually content with what they get. They are more amenable to adaptability. Steadily and silently they climb the ladder up to reach upper levels of hierarchy. They learn how to derive pleasures from little achievements in their jobs; they dare not strive for too many shiny trophies too quickly.

Whatever our jobs, whatever our pays and perks, we should remember that job satisfaction and concomitant performance depend on how we look at our career voyages. Some enjoy journeys by air and some by train; some enjoy jobs in fire brigade, some in a prestigious corporation -- and some also in a hospital for treating lepers. Deriving pleasures from every facet of life, after all, depends on the colour of the lens we look through. We must look before we can expect to see.

Maswood Alam Khan is General Manager, Bangladesh Krishi Bank.

## Lessons from the Thai camp-in

While the palace and the barracks are an integral and respected part of our nations, they don't hold the key to our future: we, the people do and it's incumbent on us to direct our politicians accordingly, after all, they serve our interests.

KARIM RASKAN

THE scenarios are uncannily similar. On one hand, a section of the populace desires radical, immediate political change, and on the other, there are those desperately seeking to maintain the status quo.

Recent events in Thailand -- the political impasse between the Samak Sundaravej administration and the PAD (People's Alliance for Democracy) demonstrators currently occupying Government House, the declaration of emergency rule and the focus of attention on the role of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the military, offer important lessons for Malaysia.

With September 16 fast approaching we have to ask, are we experiencing the calm before the storm?

What has Pakatan Rakyat leader Anwar Ibrahim planned? How would Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi respond to the crossovers? What would his options be? A snap election, the declaration of a state of emergency? The questions are endless

and the scenarios range from the sensible to the disturbing.

However, for anyone curious about the implications of an increase in royal activism and the possibility of military intervention, the Thai experience is instructive.

In essence, both institutions revealed that they did not know how to deal with a demanding and argumentative populace. It's arguable that they realised, in turn, the dangers of stepping beyond the palace and the barracks.

But first, let us consider what's been happening in Thailand over the past few weeks. On September 2, after anti-government protests that left a number of casualties, Prime Minister Samak declared a state of emergency. This has given the security forces unprecedented powers to end the mounting uncertainty.

The reasons behind the turmoil are complex. The prime movers of the demonstration, the PAD, have accused Samak of being little more than a proxy for deposed former premier Thaksin Shinawatra.

Thaksin, as we all know, has chosen to flee to Britain to escape the latest round of corruption

charges against him. The protesters occupied Government House and several key points in the city, sparking clashes with security forces and pro-administration elements.

It must be pointed out that the PAD are not exactly "democrats." They are in fact, a loose coalition of businessmen, middle-class activists and ultra-royalists opposed to the very concept. Indeed, the PAD wishes to suspend Thailand's latest constitution and introduce direct rule by the revered King Bhumibol.

It is very difficult to determine who the "good guys" are. Certainly, corruption, dubious governance and heavy-handed policing of the southern provinces swamped Thaksin's administration. Whilst his reputation has been damned irretrievably amongst democrats across the globe. On one hand, you have the rural, low-income populace of the country who make up the electoral base of Thaksin's power.

They have supposedly benefited from Thaksin's policies and resent the seemingly-dissident minority in Bangkok that seeks to illegally overturn their choice for

government.

On the other hand, however, we are faced with the key middle-class constituencies that make up the PAD. Disgruntled by the "corruption" (read: re-directed patronage) of the Thaksin and Samak administrations and encroachment on civil liberties, the stubborn support of their rural counterparts for the two might seem infuriatingly senseless to them.

The contentions of both sides, like it or not, are equally legitimate and, again, shows how deeply divided Thailand has become not only politically, but socially as well. It is not clear how this current crisis will play out. What is obvious, however, is that King Bhumibol and the Thai military will play a major role in determining which side prevails.

However, Armed Forces Chief General Anupong Paochina has declared that his men and the police would only be used "to get them (the protesters) out with a peaceful conclusion," demurring to do so because "that would create more problems."

The general's caution is understandable. The 2006 coup, ousting Thaksin ushered in a period of unmitigated failure and embarrassment for the military. In short, while Samak has turned to the military in this instance, it's clear that in the long run, only politi-

cians can solve Thailand's political problems.

While the King is revered and the military feared, the two institutions are not equipped to manage the kingdom's socio-political cleavages. This crisis can either see the rebirth of Thai democracy, or its complete suppression.

Doesn't this all sound familiar? Many are envisaging similar scenarios here in Malaysia. Certainly, the fissures are equally deep. On the one hand, a section of the populace desires radical, immediate political change, while on the other, others are desperately seeking to maintain the status quo.

It has to be said that the first group led by Anwar -- with only 80 Pakatan Rakyat MPs -- would appear to lack the legitimacy necessary to take power. We also need to ask whether inducements are being offered to those about to "jump?"

Having said that, the second group -- the Barisan Nasional -- appears unable to maintain the composure or integrity needed to retain power. A 12-day study trip abroad for government backbenchers in the middle of the fasting month doesn't inspire confidence in the Barisan.

Indeed it smells of fear. It is also an insult to the integrity and credibility of younger lawmakers in Parliament -- many of whom were rightfully appalled.

Still, both sides are struggling to come to terms with the new realities. Distrust for politicians is growing, along with voices for the suspension of democracy.

But as with Thailand, such measures -- I repeat -- are merely a temporary balm. A permanent settlement to the current political impasse has to be hammered out "politically." The departure of Thaksin, perhaps the last failed attempt to revive the strongman culture in Thai/Asian governance, represents the end of such politics, just as our oligarchy was ended in Malaysia on March 8.

For those who are sick of politics and feel it is the root of all our current problems, be forewarned, the real evil is the idea that a top-down undemocratic solution can supplant the political.

Both Thailand and Malaysia need effective stakeholder management and consensus building in order to resolve the deep fissures in our societies.

While the palace and the barracks are an integral and respected part of our nations, they don't hold the key to our future: we, the people do and it's incumbent on us to direct our politicians accordingly, after all, they serve our interests.

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## New world order?

While the EU relies on Russian energy and needs Moscow's cooperation to deal with crisis spots like the Middle East and Iran, Russia is equally dependent on European investments in its energy sector. It needs European markets for sales of its oil and gas.

SHADA ISLAM

WORRIES have been growing for some time, but the guns of August dramatically exposed the European Union's dilemma in dealing with an assertive and energy-rich Russia, especially its foreign and security presence in its eastern neighbourhood.

As Moscow flexes muscles in Georgia, the EU's capacity for decisive action is hampered by deep divisions on how best to deal with resurgent Russia. This worries many former Soviet states who fear that Russia, in its present aggressive mood, will sabotage their efforts to

draw closer to both the EU and Nato, thereby putting their independence and sovereignty at risk.

Already the tough stance taken by the US towards Russia is causing some discomfort among its European allies. The war in Georgia marked "the end of the post Cold War period of growing geopolitical calm in and around Europe," British Foreign Secretary David Miliband warned recently echoing Washington's concern. He added that Ukraine could be next in line to face Russia's wrath.

The EU's so-called "old" member states France, Germany and Italy have historically lobbied for a more conciliatory approach

towards Russia, not least because of their dependence on Russian oil and gas resources.

Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said the West had made a "mistake" by humiliating Russia from 1991 to 2000, asking Moscow to be "a supplier of energy and welcome our investments" without being given a "political role" in return. "Russia has nourished a frustration which today exploded," Frattini said.

In contrast, "new" formerly communist EU states, including Baltic nations and Poland -- joined by Sweden and Britain -- press for a tougher line on Moscow, arguing that Russia should not be allowed to become the dominant power in the region.

Complicating the picture further are deep divisions within some EU governments over Russia. The schism within the German coalition is most marked, with Chancellor Angela Merkel, much less willing to compromise with Moscow than her Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier whose Social Democrat party favours a close partnership with Russia.

Steinmeier once served as chief of staff for former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, who is now co-manager of a Baltic Sea pipeline project involving Gazprom, the Russian state-owned gas monopoly. French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his chief diplomat

Bernard Kouchner also appear to be singing from distinctly different song sheets. The former appears uneasy about ruffling Russian feathers, but known human-rights advocate Kouchner has accused the country of seeking to start another cold war.

Equally critically, Russia's tough stance casts a question mark over Europe's plans for further expansion into what Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin regards as a "post-Soviet space." While EU policymakers have so far only identified western Balkan states as future candidates, the bloc is seeking to strengthen relations with Georgia and Ukraine through an ambitious "neighbourhood policy" which includes the granting of trade and aid concessions and access to easier travel facilities. Russia has made no secret of its wariness of such initiatives.

EU governments acknowledge that given Russia's view that the current US administration is too friendly with Georgia, it's up to Europe to play honest broker. However, to carry weight in Moscow, the Union must speak with one voice -- an elusive goal so far. A meeting of EU leaders on September 1, the 27-nation bloc's efforts to craft a credible policy towards Moscow was trampled by deep discord due to history, geography and countries' varied dependence on Russian oil and gas.

EU governments also disagree on mapping out a long-term strategy for deepening relations with Georgia and Ukraine, two countries which, encouraged by Washington, harbour ambitions of joining both the Union and the western military alliance. France and Germany are lukewarm about opening EU doors to Ukraine,

and oppose Washington's demand to invite them to join Nato.

Although divided, EU leaders cannot be accused of inaction. Sarkozy was quick off the mark to broker a ceasefire agreement signed by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili, which ended the short but bloody war last month. German Chancellor Merkel has also engaged in similarly frantic shuttle diplomacy between Moscow and Tbilisi.

Their efforts have produced few lasting results, however, highlighting what EU officials admit is the bloc's limited leverage over Russia. Russia not only flouted its own commitment to withdraw their troops from Georgia to their pre-war positions by August 22, despite warnings by EU governments, Russian President Medvedev recognised the Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a move condemned by the EU as a breach of international law.

Despite such concerns, EU leaders attending the emergency summit in Brussels this week opted for a cautious strategy, shying away from sanctions that would undercut EU-Russia trade or jeopardise EU imports of Russian energy sources.

Europe's cautious approach is no surprise. Russia delivers over 40 percent of EU gas imports. A third of Europe's imported oil now comes from Russia, the EU's third most important trading partner, after the US and China.

EU leaders also rejected calls that they immediately suspend negotiations on an ambitious partnership agreement with Moscow despite demands for such a move by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. Suggestions that Moscow could

be expelled from the Group of Eight industrialised nations or that Europe should boycott the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi were rejected. "We don't want channels of communication with Russia to be cut off," argued Merkel.

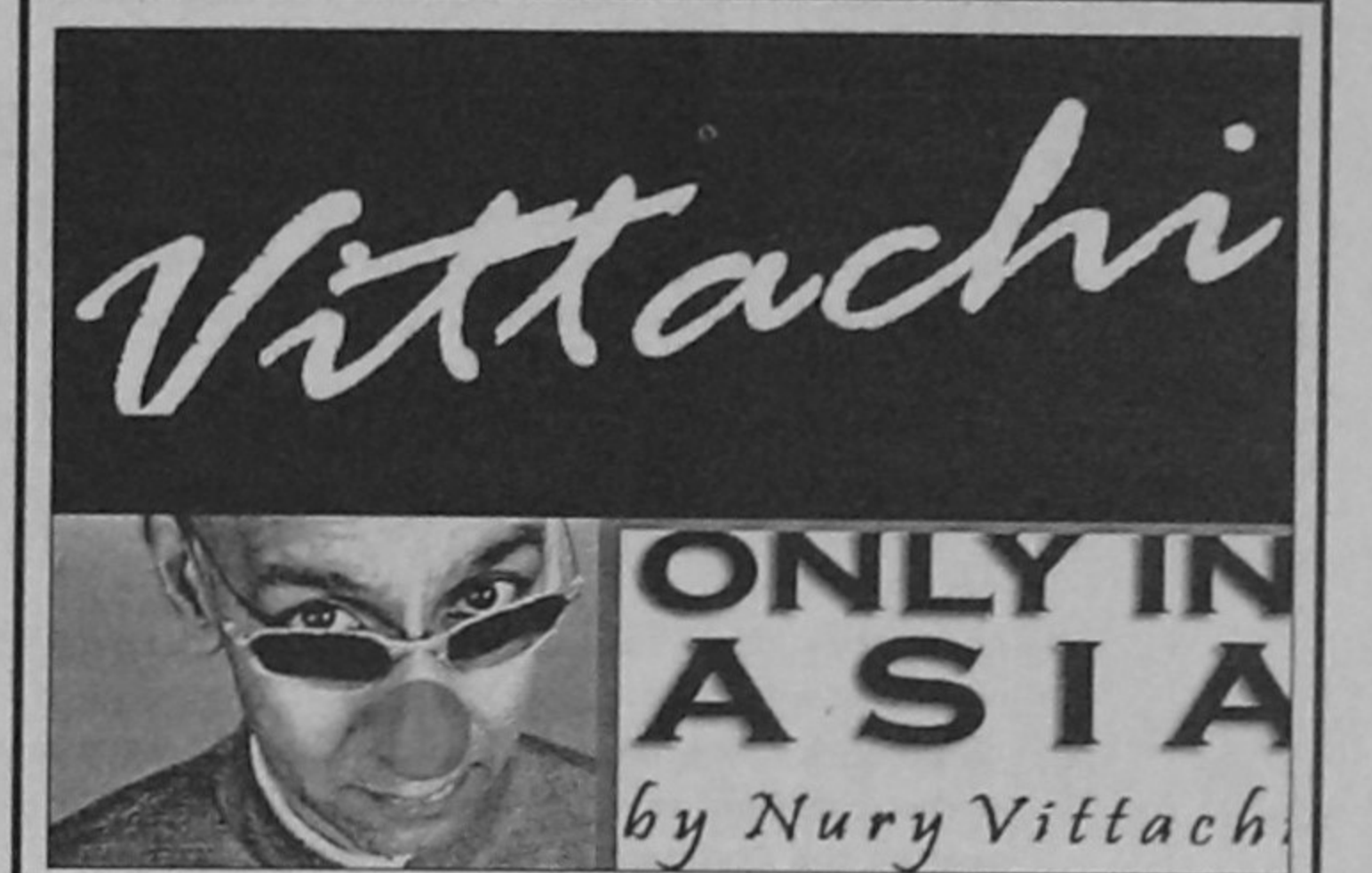
Given such discord, rethinking EU policy towards Russia is likely to be a difficult, long-haul effort, requiring a clear assessment of EU-Russian interdependence. But all the cards are not stacked in Russia's favor.

While the EU relies on Russian energy and needs Moscow's cooperation to deal with crisis spots like the Middle East and Iran, Russia is equally dependent on European investments in its energy sector. It needs European markets for sales of its oil and gas. In addition, EU backing is necessary if Moscow is to join the World Trade Organization.

Revisiting EU-Russian relations requires that European governments take concerted action to reduce their dependence on Russian energy by fully liberalising currently fragmented EU energy markets, step up the search for renewables and -- in the case of Germany -- reconsider their aversion to developing nuclear energy.

Action on the eastern front is needed as well. While quick EU membership is clearly not on the cards for Georgia and Ukraine, European governments must step up their engagement with eastern neighbours, including delivering on their promised support for Georgia's reconstruction and other benefits.

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## Why superstitious Asians need a good kicking

HERE'S a rumour bouncing around the Internet in Asia that there will be a total of five disasters related to the five cartoon mascots of the Olympics (the Sichuan earthquake was one of the disasters).

This is silly. I don't believe in bad luck, and have removed the Olympic mascot figurines from my desk merely for dusting.

But it's interesting. Here in Asia, we do not succumb to primitive superstitions involving black cats and ladders and so on. No -- we succumb to modern superstitions involving licensed characters and lucky bullets.

One of my favourite examples is the "guaranteed" good luck services offered at the Sathit Chonlantan temple in Pattani, Thailand.

It is widely accepted that Thai soldiers and police officers who have obtained tattoos from the temple have excellent luck, and those who also receive a swift kick from the head monk become bullet-proof and immune to shoot-out-related health problems such as death. But it only works if the head monk kicks you using his right leg.

I am not making this up. So many uniformed men have been flocking to the temple to be made invulnerable that monk-tattoos lowered their needles and invested in an automatic tattooing machine.

But the swift kick in the lower parts from the head monk cannot be done by machine, and so still has to be done manually, er, podially.

The temple is also famous for dispensing "anti-violence bullets". Instead of gunpowder, the cartridges are filled with 108 herbs and invisible spiritual power. Carrying an anti-violence bullet means that you become immune to being shot, although, for your convenience and pleasure, you can still blast away at other people. Malaysia is another place

where people are superstitious in a modern way.

I once reported on an incident in which 13 people got into trouble for working as unlicensed lottery number tippers in Selangor. The problem was not their accuracy level (supposedly very high) but the fact that they were all dead at the time.

Thirteen ghosts in graves in Bukit Jagra transmitted lucky numbers into the brains of visitors, who then went off and amassed fortunes, locals said.

They did this so well that there were soon queues of people at the graveyard, and a waiting system had to be organised.

You got a numbered ticket, just like you would get from, say, a mobile phone repair shop -- only it was for getting betting advice from rotting zombies in a graveyard (hey, this is Asia).

Sadly, local officials eventually decided that this was all too esoteric for Hi-Tech Malaysia, Country of the Future and Birthplace of Laksa Noodle Soup.

They turned up at the graveyard with hammers. They demolished the site, thus halting the operation and leaving the 13 ghost tippers, er, dead. Well, deader, anyway.

Disappointed would-be lottery customers went off to pick their numbers by the use of more rational, scientific methods (many of which involved the use of chicken entrails).

Now I need to stop writing this column, because it is nearly lunchtime, and I need to make sure my luck is flowing.

How shall I do it? Buy a lottery ticket? Invest in a tattoo? Fly to Thailand and pay for a swift kick in the nether regions from a monk?

Surely there must be someone who would supply me with such a service for nothing.

You'll kick yourself if you waste time reading our columnist's website. www.vittachi.com.



Russia's president in a good mood?