



Make me younger

Dear Sir or Madam, I am writing to apply for a vacant position. I realise you have not advertised any vacancies in the area in which I am interested, but I thought I would write in anticipation of a post becoming available.

The job I want to apply for is "Child." I realise that I am a little bit (okay, several decades) past the usual age for this position, but I believe I can be retrained.

Last week, I was crossing a pedestrian walkway with my child when we saw a beggar. I saw a smelly man flouting society's conventions and speeded up my steps to pass as quickly as possible. My child saw a person in need and gave him a huge smile.

Then we crossed a car park. I saw a patch of dirty ground with oily puddles to be avoided. She saw rainbow-filled pools to be stirred into psychedelic patterns with the toe of her shoe.

Then we passed a group of men digging a large hole in the road. I saw an irritating danger to traverse. She saw a glimpse of the heart and lungs of the city and insisted on stopping to watch for a full eight minutes.

Then we headed to a shopping street for lunch. As a boringly predictable adult, I suggested Starbucks. But she smelled fried noodles and dragged me into a student's cafe where we shared a really tasty meal for less than the price of one designer cappuccino.

Then I scanned the newspaper to look for cinemas, shopping malls or theme parks to visit. She decided "the fun-est thing to do" would be to take a ferry nowhere in particular and then take it straight back to where we started. So that's what we did. It was fun. And then we headed home.

On our journey, it became clear to me I am not cut out to be an Adult. How could I have got it so wrong? In my teen years, I believed I was born to be one. Not only was I growing taller, but my voice was getting deeper, my skin hairier and my birthdays greater in number. Drifting into Adulthood seemed natural.

However, I now realise this was a gross error. I had not fully considered the consequences.

So I resign from Adulthood with immediate effect. Please find enclosed my car keys, my house keys, my credit cards and my gold membership card to the Old Codgers' Club.

I will no longer pretend to like subtitled European art house movies. When asked what my all-time favourite movie is, I shall admit to it being The Lion King.

I will no longer buy suits from tailors who offer me a choice of colors limited to grey, grey or grey.

I will no longer pretend to enjoy books which have won the Booker Prize and will re-read The Magician's Nephew.

I will no longer pretend I like sitting in bars late into the night discussing politics. I will go straight home after work and play Monopoly.

I will no longer eat organic lettuce drizzled with olive oil. I will have Coco Pops for dinner.

Why not join me? You might like it.

For more journey to your youthful self, visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Celebrating the young

Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. However, if they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished.

DULAL BISWAS

INTERNATIONAL Youth Day will be celebrated at United Nations headquarters in New York with the global launch of the International Year of Youth on August 12. The event will be a celebration of young peoples' energy, imagination and initiatives, and will recognise their crucial contributions to enhancing peace and development.

It is important to recognise that, because of young people's positive contributions to society, the international community has increased recognition of the significance of youth populations in advancing development. And, through that shift in consciousness, we find ourselves celebrating a year dedicated to addressing youth development with focused attention.

As we acknowledge young people as the impetus to this historical event, we cannot help but be inspired by their efforts to jumpstart the

Year with enthusiasm and sustained momentum over the next 12 months.

The upsurge in recent years of the number of youth-led organisations is a testament to the fact that today's young people are dedicated social activists possessing sophisticated skills, and are effectively mobilising for collective action despite the multi-faceted challenges they confront.

As the focal point on youth for the UN system, the United Nations Programme on Youth has the unique advantage of organising, participating in and tracking youth-related efforts taking place in every corner of the world. Every day, we learn about the initiatives young people are conceptualising and implementing -- often with profound creativity and compassion -- which adds great value to, and inspires, our own work.

All young people possess unique talents that they may utilise to develop creative activities to raise awareness on issues affecting them and their communities. Talent can be so much

more than one might think, and it is sometimes hard to know what talent one possesses. This Year yields an excellent opportunity to find and identify our inner talents by taking action to raise awareness and to contribute something positive to our society.

It is when you work together with your community to change or improve something in your community that you have a chance to find out what your talents are. Perhaps, you speak several languages, have artistic abilities, are an excellent communicator, are a natural leader, an effective mediator, possesses project management skills including accounting skills, are good at identifying problems and targeted solutions or motivating and mobilising others. The list can be quite long.

Youth inspire us everyday. We hope they will also serve as sources of inspiration for you to celebrate the International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding.

There are roughly 70 million unemployed young people in the world today, and many more are struggling for survival on low wages and in poor working conditions, often in the informal sector, with little or no job protection, benefits or prospects for the future. Unemployment affects young people disproportionately; the 15-to-24 age group accounts for more than 40% of the world's total unemployed, and youth unemployment rates are

typically two to three times higher than the rates for adults.

Being unemployed as a youth takes an enduring toll, damaging prospects for employment later in life. To break this destructive cycle of despair, poverty, and social instability, the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the World Bank have jointly launched a Youth Employment Network to come up with proposals that cover the full range of the challenge of youth employment.

Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.

The idea for International Youth Day was proposed in 1991 by the young people who were gathered in Vienna, Austria, for the first session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations System. The Forum recommended that an International Youth Day be declared, especially for fund-raising and promotional purposes, to support the United Nations.

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It's time to end the Korean war

The only way to ease the tensions and improve the quality of life of the Koreans is to resume the six-party talks with a view to signing a peace treaty. It is highly unlikely that the two Koreas will be united in the near future. But a peace treaty will definitely remove one of the flashpoints of East-West confrontation

CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM

JOINT US-South Korean naval exercises consisting of over 200 aircraft, including F-22 jet fighters, thousands of troops and the nuclear-powered American aircraft carrier George Washington were recently held off the eastern coast of the Korean peninsula. Japanese armed forces were also present in the exercises.

South Korean President Lee Myung-bak wanted to hold them in the Yellow Sea. Fortunately, the US government paid heed to Chinese warnings and moved the war games to the East Sea. According to the American government the intention was to send a strong message to the North Koreans that it would not be allowed to get away with military actions like the alleged sinking of the South Korean warship, the Cheonan, which was sailing in disputed waters of the Yellow Sea.

Needless to say, North Korea considered these actions as provocative and threatened "physical response" and Hillary Clinton threatened further economic sanctions. As though this was not enough, America's enhanced interest in the area consisting of the South China Sea islands has heightened the tension in East Asia to such a level that any miscalculation may lead to a major confrontation between US, China and the two Koreas. Behind all this rhetoric and military

posturing, there lies the fact that although an armistice was signed in 1953, a peace treaty ending the Korean War was never signed. Whereas in Europe and elsewhere there have been reconciliation and reunification -- Germany is a good example -- to ameliorate the consequences of the Second World War, unfortunately, the Koreans as a people are still suffering from the after-effects of first, the Japanese colonial rule and then the Second World War.

Like Poland, Korea's geographical location has been the major source of its problems. Its history has been much influenced by the actions and territorial ambitions of its powerful neighbours -- China, Japan and Russia.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese influence in every sphere of Korean life could be felt everywhere. China and Korea maintained military, commercial and cultural alliances. In recent times China did not militarily occupy Korea.

At the end of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95, in which Japan emerged victorious, China was forced to acknowledge Japanese hegemony in Korea. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 consolidated Japan's position in southern Manchuria and Korea.

In 1905 Japan, with the tacit approval of President Theodore Roosevelt, militarily occupied Korea. (In a reciprocal gesture,

Japan acquiesced in the US atrocities in the Philippines.) In 1910 Japan annexed Korea and ruled it as a colony until 1945.

In order to bring the war in the Pacific to an expeditious end, in 1945, the Americans pressed Stalin at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences for the Red Army to enter Manchuria and Korea. In response, on August 8, 1945, the Soviet army entered Manchuria and southern Sakhalin.

An agreement was reached between the conquering powers to divide arbitrarily the Japanese colony of Korea, thus separating friends and splitting families for the foreseeable future. The thirty-eighth parallel became the border; the Soviets occupied the North and the Americans that the South. (It is interesting to note here that had the West not pressed Stalin so much to invade Korea, there would be no North Korean problem today.)

Thus after living for forty years under the tyrannical rule of the Japanese, the Koreans found themselves in an even worse situation. Their colonial status remained unchanged and on top of that they now had two masters -- the Soviets and the Americans -- with two opposing political and economic systems.

The bulk of the Soviet and American occupation forces were withdrawn from the country before the end of 1948.

Both in North and South Korea two independent (some would say puppet,) republics were set up with the intention of continuing negotiations to unite the country. Ordinary people on both sides wanted unification. Unfortunately, there were several important factors which played against the realisation of this dream.

First of all, the leaders on both sides -- Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee -- were rigid ideologues. Each wanted to "liberate" the other -- for them there was no

room for compromise. The rise of McCarthyism in US forced President Truman to "prove to the American people that he and the Democratic Party were not soft on communism."

According to Prof. Stephen E. Ambrose: "In June 1950, he (Truman) badly needed another crisis, one that would allow him to extend containment in Asia, to shore up Chiang's position on Formosa, to retain American bases in Japan and most of all to rearm America and Nato." On June 25, 1950, an over-confident Kim Il-sung provided him with this crisis or opportunity by invading South Korea.

On June 30, Truman ordered American troops stationed in dozens of Japanese bases to move into Korea to confront the invading North Koreans. After repulsing the attack, on October 7, American troops crossed the thirty-eighth parallel and started moving north towards Chinese borders. Now it seemed that US was no longer interested in only "containment" but also the "liberation" of the North and other communist countries.

When US ignored Chinese warnings not to proceed north China attacked the invading American troops, forcing them to retreat beyond the 38th parallel. General MacArthur, commander of the American forces in Korea wanted to invade China and use the atomic bomb.

The overall situation became even more alarming when, on November 30, President Truman stated that under certain circumstances, he would authorise MacArthur to use the atomic bomb against the Chinese. The world owes a great debt of gratitude to British Prime Minister Lord Attlee, who immediately flew to Washington and persuaded Truman not to use atomic bomb again on an Asian people in such a short span of time.

The war continued on a conventional basis until July 27, 1953, when an armistice



stice was signed. More than four million people died in the conflict, and the economies of both the north and south were devastated. Yet, the war achieved nothing. It ended in an uneasy stalemate and has, unfortunately, remained so until today.

True, South Korea has prospered and, under Soviet-style communism and American sponsored economic sanctions, North Korea has become a closed society. Although the intention of the sanctions was not to hurt the ordinary people, they are suffering and becoming more radicalised. To make things more complicated, North Korea has recently developed the atomic bomb.

The US thinks that sanctions will force North Korea to dismantle its nuclear project, which, in my opinion, is a wishful thinking. Knowing America's track record

of invading non-nuclear countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, North Korea feels that its security lies in having the nukes. The more threatened it feels, the greater will be its desire to hang on to the nukes.

The only way to ease the tensions and improve the quality of life of the Koreans is to resume the six-party talks with a view to signing a peace treaty. It is highly unlikely that the two Koreas will be united in the near future. But a peace treaty will definitely remove one of the flashpoints of East-West confrontation and may eventually lead to talks on reunification. Nothing will please the ordinary Koreans on both sides of the 38th parallel more than becoming a united country again.

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