

# Necessity of learning foreign languages

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As global business and transactions of multinational companies are increasing, we need knowledge of foreign languages (apart from English) to ensure our place in today's competitive world. The globalisation of economies and hybridisation of cultures demand teaching of foreign languages more than ever before. Today, knowing a common foreign language has become not only a necessity but also a compulsion for a successful career in international relations, media, trade, government, technology, and science. Comparing the place of foreign language in education systems, for example, in Europe, the United States, Japan, China and even India, Bangladesh should reconsider its education mechanism in a changed world.

Lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and foreign languages challenges our students' ability to compete in the global marketplace. Moreover, Bangladesh education system placed little value on foreign languages other than English or on understanding cultures other than our own. Hence, language skills and understanding of cultures are urgently needed to address economic challenges and the strength of Bangladesh businesses in global marketplace. So, our entire education system needs the capacity to provide requisite foreign language training.

More than 52.7% of Europeans are fluent in both their native tongue and at least one other language. At least one foreign language is taught in most schools around the world. EU emphasises the importance of schoolchildren learning at least two foreign languages before their upper secondary education. The Lisbon Summit of 2000 ranked foreign languages

as one of the five key skills. A report suggests that speaking a second language could increase an average worker's salary by £3,000 (₳ 3,300) a year.

Nowadays Chinese, Japanese and especially some European languages have become very important in the world for study and economic purposes. For example, German and French are considered to be important languages of the world because both of them have influential literature and economic aspects related with them. French and German should be popularised for economic reasons in our country. Learning these languages will help us to be more connected economically and culturally and to explore our possibility benefits from globalisation. In addition, it will give us impetus to build a healthy diaspora in Europe to discover new destinations of remittance flow.

Knowledge of German in particular improves one's chances in the employment market. Many German companies abroad, and various foreign companies in Germany and companies with close links to German-speaking countries, look for employees with knowledge of German.

Germany is still the key trading partner for almost all the European countries and many countries outside Europe.

Bangladesh, being a huge labour surplus country, has potential to boost its economy by structural emphasis on foreign languages. Remittances sent by migrants through official channels

ber of Bangladeshi migrants in Europe could be increased from 5% to 25% within a decade.

It is a matter of concern that the unsatisfactory performance of students in language and literacy are visible at all levels of our education system, with its accompanying effects on language competence.

This negatively affects the potential for human development. In order to provide solutions while responding properly to developing trends in our region and beyond in the age of geo-economics, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment can formulate a national policy and strategy on language education. Apart from many private and public universities, foreign languages can be taught from school level as well. International skills should be a major part in every young

person's school curriculum.

Research indicates that children who are exposed to a foreign language at a young age achieve higher levels of cognitive development and are better at solving complex problems than those who are not (Bialystok & Hakuta 1994). All these fac-

tors emphasise the urgency for learning foreign languages in addition to our mother tongue. In India, for example, learning a foreign language is mandatory from class seven.

It is crystal clear that Bangladesh is far behind other countries on the foreign language issue. Our young people are at a growing disadvantage in the employment market because knowledge of English is not enough. Despite calls for action, we have fallen further behind the rest of the world in preparing our students to communicate effectively in languages other than English. An unsuccessful attempt was made in 1983 to introduce Arabic as a required language in primary and secondary levels. However, Arabic was not a popular subject at the college and university level. Bangladesh needs a complete language policy.

Among those engaged in international education, it is considered a basic premise that, in today's knowledge-based global economy and society, full command of at least one foreign language is a core competency that should become compulsory for all graduates of higher-education institutions. It is also generally acknowledged that higher-education institutions and the educational systems should make more serious efforts to go beyond mere lip-service by making sure that proficiency in a foreign language is really acquired at a functional level. Parents and educators would be wise to take advantage of the many available opportunities and resources for foreign language learning for the benefit of children coming of age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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reached a record \$11 billion in 2010 while formal remittances inflow in 2010 was \$10,804 million (World Bank, 2011). Percentage of Bangladeshi migrants by continent of destination in Europe is only 5% while in Asia it is 92% (Human Development Report, 2009). It is assumed that by acquiring European languages the num-

## US-Bangladesh relations: Some observations

M.SHOEB CHOWDHURY

THE United States of America is the only superpower in the world today. Various international organisations like the UN, World Bank, IMF are directly influenced by US policies. The affairs of most countries in the world are also more or less influenced by Washington. The influence of the US is all pervasiveencompassing the economic, political and security related issues that concern most countries of the world.

For a country like Bangladesh the cooperation of the US is desirable for economic betterment and consolidation of democracy.

Bangladesh's economic development programmes are dependent on cooperation with international lending agencies like World Bank, ADB, etc. This dependence will remain in the future as wellat least for the foreseeable future. All these lending institutions are controlled by the US. In the interest of expediting its development activities Bangladesh has to seek the cooperation of the US.

Trade between the US and Bangladesh is very important for the latter. The US is a very important destination for goods produced in Bangladesh (especially RMG). International trade bodies like WTO are dominated by US. To secure its interest at the WTO and other such bodies Bangladesh has to obtain the support from the US. It is, therefore, extremely important for Bangladesh to maintain good relation with the US in order to achieve its development objectives and to improve its international trade prospects.

In the international arena Bangladesh has achieved a reputation by providing troops for UN peace keeping missions. In this regard, it is also important that US-Bangla relations remain friendly. US opposition to the participation of troops from Bangladesh in UN missions can lead to the suspension of international peace keeping activities for Bangladesh, resulting in significant economic loss.

American influence has a positive impact on the development of democracy in Bangladesh. The liberal policies

that the US advocates can help strengthen democratic institutions in Bangladesh. The US, a global promoter of political pluralism, has exercised beneficial influence on politics in Bangladesh and will continue to do so in the future. Bangladesh can also gain from cooperation from the US in keeping extremism as well as ultra left activities in check.

In light of the above, we can say that it is imperative for Bangladesh to establish the best relationship possible with the US in its own interest. Petty misunderstanding should not be allowed to stand in the way of the betterment of Bangladesh's friendly ties with the United States of America. We have to work together, irrespective of party affiliation, to secure the goodwill of the economic and political giant, the world's most effective superpowerAmerica.

Those who appreciate the importance of friendly relation of our country with US will be encouraged by the presence of

Ambassador Dan W. Mozena in our midst. Having worked in Bangladesh as a political counselor in the US embassy a decade earlier, he is expected to act as a positive catalyst in restoring good relations between the US and Bangladesh, to the level that existed during his previous assignment in our country. In this connection, the two countries agreed to

further cooperation in information sharing, training, investigations, research and development and policymaking.

I believe that good relation with the US will help to establish Bangladesh as a regional hub of south-east Asia.

Finally I would like to draw attention to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's proposal to the delegation of the European Union Parliament to make Dr. Muhammed Yunus the President of the World Bank. It has been welcomed, and the EU Parliament leader Jean Lambert said: "We see it as a very positive proposal, and certainly we see it as an expression of confidence about a personality like Prof. Yunus of international repute and merit, and he should be able to stand for the post."

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**The New York Times** **EXCLUSIVE**

## War really is going out of style

JOSHUA S. GOLDSTEIN *and* STEVEN PINKER

THE departure of the last US troops from Iraq brings relief to a nation that has endured its most painful war since Vietnam. But the event is momentous for another reason. The invasion of Iraq was the most recent example of an all-out war between two national armies. And it could very well be the last one.

The idea that war is obsolescent may seem preposterously utopian. Aren't we facing an endless war on terror, a clash of civilisations, the menace of nuclear rogue states? Isn't war in our genes, something that will always be with us?

The theory that war is becoming passe gained traction in the late 1980s, when scholars noticed some curious nonevents. World War III, a nuclear Armageddon, was once considered inevitable, but didn't happen. Nor had any wars between great powers occurred since the Korean War. European nations, which for centuries had fought each other at the drop of a hat, had not done so for four decades.

How has the world fared since then? Armed conflict hasn't vanished, and today anyone with a mobile phone can broadcast the bloodshed. But our impressions of the prevalence of war, stoked by these images, can be misleading. Only objective numbers can identify the trends.

"War" is a fuzzy category, shading from global conflagrations to neighbourhood turf battles, so the organisations that track the frequency and damage of war over time need a precise yardstick. A common definition picks out armed conflicts that cause at least 1,000 battle deaths in a yearsoldiers and civilians killed by war violence, excluding the difficult-to-quantify indirect deaths resulting from hunger and disease. "Interstate wars" are those fought between national armies and have historically been the deadliest.

These prototypical wars have become increasingly rare, and the world hasn't seen one since the three-week invasion of Iraq in 2003. The lopsided five-day clash between Russia and Georgia in 2008 misses the threshold, as do sporadic clashes between North and South Korea or Thailand and Cambodia.

Countries remain armed and hostile, so war is hardly impossible. But where would a new interstate war plausibly erupt? Robert Gates, the former secretary of defense, said this year that "any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined."

Chinese leaders would deserve a similar

workup if they blew off the very basis of their legitimacy, namely trade-based prosperity, by starting a war. (China has not fought a battle in 23 years.) India and Pakistan came dangerously close to war in 2002, but they backed off when both sides realised that millions would die and have since stabilised relations. Neither North nor South Korea could win a war at an acceptable cost.

What about other kinds of armed conflict, like civil wars and conflicts that miss the 1,000-death cutoff? Remarkably, they too have been in decline. Civil wars are fewer, smaller and more localised. Terrible flare-ups occur, and for those caught in the middle the results are devastatingbut far fewer people are caught in the middle. The biggest continuing war, in Afghanistan, last year killed about 500 Americans, 100 other coalition troops and 5,000 Afghans including civilians. That toll, while deplorable, is a fraction of those in past wars like Vietnam, which killed 5,000 Americans and nearly 150,000 Vietnamese per year.

Overall, the annual rate of battle deaths worldwide has fallen from almost 300 per

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100,000 of world population during World War II, to almost 30 during Korea, to the low teens during Vietnam, to single digits in the late 1970s and 1980s, to fewer than one in the 21st century.

As the political scientist John Mueller has pointed out, today's civil wars are closer to organised crime than traditional war. Armed militiasreally gangs of thugsmonopolise resources like cocaine in Colombia or coltan in Congo, or terrorise the locals into paying tribute to religious fanatics, as in Somalia, Nigeria and the Philippines.

Nor has the suffering merely been displaced from soldiers to civilians. The much-quoted statistic that war deaths a century ago were 90% military and 10% civilian, while today the ratio is reversed, resulted from an error in a 1994 U.N. report that mistakenly compared deaths in World War I with refugees and wounded in the 1980s. The real ratio is around 50-50 and stable through time.

Yes, atrocities against civilians continue, but consider a historical perspective. During

World War II, Allied forces repeatedly and deliberately firebombed Axis cities, incinerating tens of thousands of civilians in a night. The Germans and Japanese did far worse. Today's rapes, ethnic cleansings and suicide bombings are just as atrocious, but much smaller in scale.

Why is war in decline? For one thing, it no longer pays. For centuries, wars reallocated huge territories, as empires were agglomerated or dismantled and states wiped off the map. But since shortly after World War II, virtually no borders have changed by force, and no member of the U.N. has disappeared through conquest. The Korean War caused a million battle deaths, but the border ended up where it started. The Iran-Iraq War killed 650,000 with the same result. Iraq's annexation of Kuwait in 1990 backfired. Israel seized land in 1967, but since then most has been returned and the rest remains contested.

The futility of conquest is part of the emergence of an international community regulated by norms and taboos and wielding more effective tools for managing conflicts. Among those tools, the U.N.'s 100,000 deployed peacekeepers have measurably improved the success of peace agreements in civil wars.

War also declines as prosperity and trade rise. Historically, wealth came from land and conquest was profitable. Today, wealth comes from trade, and war only hurts. When leaders' power depends on delivering economic growth, and when a country's government becomes richer and stronger than its warlords, war loses its appeal.

Perhaps the deepest cause of the waning of war is a growing repugnance toward institutionalised violence. Brutal customs that were commonplace for millennia have been largely abolished: cannibalism, human sacrifice, heretic-burning, chattel slavery, punitive mutilation, sadistic executions. Could war really be going the way of slave auctions? Nothing in our nature rules it out.

True, we still harbour demons like greed, dominance, revenge and self-deception. But we also have faculties that inhibit them, like self-control, empathy, reason and a sense of fairness. We will always have the capacity to kill one another in large numbers, but with effort we can safeguard the norms and institutions that have made war increasingly repugnant.

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