

Asia as global leader - not so fast

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AS the European economy teeters on the verge of a second recession and the US recovery wobbles, Asia is brimming with optimism. For Asian triumphalists attending a recent conference in Thailand "Reading the Signposts of a Changing Landscape" the signs are big, clear and point to a happy future. I'm less sure. The wording on many signposts is confused, with many pointing towards dead-ends or quicksand. In the rush of exuberant expectations that Asia's time has come, the continent could fall victim to what's behind many failures in the history of the world - simple hubris. The rise of Asia is not predetermined, just as the dominance of Western civilization for the past few hundred years was not preordained. The rise of European imperialism and then American hegemony was not simply due to economic power backed by military might. It was underpinned by innovative, even revolutionary thinking, about the primacy of the rule of law; the separation of church and state; the commitment to an empirical, scientific worldview; and all the institutions that brought about the modern state built on liberal democracy and market capitalism. Much of the intellectual vigor propelling the West to supremacy is now spent. In its place is frustration that the old order is not working, with no vision as to what the new order should be.

So could Asia rise to the occasion and, in the intellectual vacuum, offer new solutions to bankrupt thinking? Is the continent capable of creative destruction of taboos and restrictive mindsets hobbling it during past centuries? Is Asia's economic growth matched by equally vigorous intellectual innovation?

The regional landscape offers clues. India, for example, has managed, despite numerous challenges, to remain the world's largest practicing democracy. But the continuing clash and contradictions between tradition and modernity renders Indian political and social relations almost dysfunctional. And while Indian pride in its scientific, artistic and business achievements is justified, the continuing inability to lift millions of people out of abject poverty remains a sobering and hopefully not insurmountable challenge.

China, the other great and ancient civilization of Asia, is today to become the second most powerful economy in the world. Its government has, unlike India, lifted teeming masses from abject poverty. Private capitalism thrives alongside the more dominant state capitalism. But the absence of a dynamic civil society unlike

in India and its opaque political structure, as so glaringly revealed by the Bo Xilai scandal, is possibly unsustainable.

India suffers from a lack of political consensus; China has too much of it. India has a surfeit of democracy and a deficit of economic equality; China has eradicated poverty, but suppressed democracy.

Indian thought leaders realize that democracy has not reduced inequality or improved the lives for most Indians. Chinese intellectuals recognize that the current systemic problems of political governance, glossed over by rapid economic growth, are unsustainable and brittle. But neither knows how to move forward beyond recognition of the need for drastic reform. Intellectual innovation and political power are not integrated. Japan's social cohesion stands in stark

steadily.

While one can't deny the real achievements of an ascendant Asian civilization, it's difficult to accept the facile self-congratulations of the triumphalists who suggest that Asia's success in this century is inevitable. Even those who believe fervently that Asia's time has come cannot afford complacency. Asia requires diverse, innovative thought leadership if its economic rise will result in a sustainable, new paradigm for civilizational progress.

In particular, Asia needs to inculcate a virtuous cycle whereby business, political and social leaders interact to create new norms of economic, social and political behavior and values. One example is the dire need of a replacement for the highly individualistic, American form of capitalism which at its best, enormously rewards risk-taking, but at its worst, creates mon-

wealth creation, where the interests of the community of stakeholders in an enterprise - owners, employees, customers and suppliers and the larger community would be a higher consideration than return on capital.

In other words, communitarian capitalism would be stakeholder-driven, not simply shareholder-driven.

One of the contradictions of globalization is the starkly worsening income inequalities across the world, particularly in Asia. There is no middle way, no waffling position where Asia's elite claim credit for generating growth but deny responsibility for its negative consequences. Such waffling unfortunately, is what most Asian business leaders are doing today; hiding their heads under the sand, thinking that if they simply stick to what they're good at doing - creating and consuming wealth - they are part of the invisible hand of productive capitalism. But that's just not good enough because, as we've seen, unfettered capitalism is not an absolute good, and often businessmen deepen its imperfections.

History has shown how many institutions of a modern and progressive society, such as liberal democracy or universal suffrage, arose out of the demands of a rising business class - the bourgeoisie. Asia's rising middle class needs to play the same historic role as their counterparts in Europe several hundred years ago.

Thought leadership need not be in grandiose or visionary ideas, but can small, practical solutions to real problems. For example, as a tiny country, Singapore has no pretensions of being a global thought leader. It has simply and quietly created solutions to its own set of changing circumstances, setting a model for others.

Singapore's approach to social security and public housing, launched many decades ago, has been universally hailed as revolutionary. In the field of sustainable resource management for cities, Singapore is probably one of the leading world examples.

Across Asia, there are many more examples of innovative, inspiring thought leadership covering a spectrum of fields. But this is not enough. Asia needs fundamental paradigm shifts, particularly on political and business governance, if it's to reach the vision of its future. Future generations will either blame or thank the present elite for what they do, or more disappointingly, choose not to do.

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contrast against China and India, but that same homogeneity and social conservatism has left it stranded in genteel decline, with no new thinking to break the country out of its stifling insularity.

South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore are probably the best examples of societies which grew rapidly due what political scientists call "developmental authoritarianism" and have successfully transitioned to liberal democracy. But their models of development are not easily transplanted to larger, more diverse societies.

South East Asia has largely recovered from the debilitating financial crisis in the late 1990s, which nearly crippled its private sector and brought down its banks. But internal contradictions remain unresolved in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia and are, arguably, growing

strous inequalities based on speculative gambling of other people's money. Capitalism is not universally identical; it's shaped by history and culture, resulting in the Scandinavian variant or the German model. The American model may not be broken, but after recent financial debacles, Asia should not blindly adopt it.

Asia needs to delve into its own history and culture for inspiration in creating an Asian variant of capitalism. One such source can be the webs of mutual obligations which serve as a common, recurring socio-ethical tradition of Asia. This communitarian characteristic of Asian culture can, if thoughtfully enhanced, nurtured and developed, replace the highly individualistic, Darwinian ethos of American capitalism. Communitarian capitalism can be an Asian form of ethical

Soldiering : A philosophical elucidation

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THE word 'Philosophy' means love of wisdom. Throughout the ages philosophy both slowly and rapidly shaped the society. So to the soldiering being the oldest profession and it has its own glamour due to many reasons. Soldiering is mostly related to mission accomplishment, valour, sacrifice, selflessness etc. Therefore, soldier's creed is something special that only soldiers can feel. On many counts it is the profession for the adventurous and their activities remain all times challenging.

Throughout the history, training for soldiers was the best. From the ancient time one of the greatest philosophers of that era, Aristotle was the teacher and mentor of Alexander. Possibly, 'setting personal example' while leading the people in danger turned into a dictum in leadership trait since then. Alexander, being the son of a King felt fully responsible for the wellbeing and development of the Greeks. However, he strongly believed in aristocracy as part of good governance and decision making. In the same era, a Chinese philosopher Sun Zu appeared with the 'ART OF WAR'. Here he postulated the philosophy of harmony between commanders and under commands and amongst the branches of organization(s). In the 19th Century Carl Von Clausewitz also described the requirement of harmony of elements of an army as most of the military matters are the product of free activities of the soul. Hence, selecting and grooming a group of young men to officers (leaders) need due attention. Therefore, the selection of both selectors and makers of the leaders require special care.

Soldiers have captured world history and a good number of American presidents have been from



ARMY RECOGNITION

this cadre. Out of forty four US presidents, more than thirty had military training. A Republican president Abraham Lincoln's interpretation on 'Democracy' was people centric, simple and is considered to be the best. Three clean heart infantrymen like George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, Dwight D. Eisenhower were General of the Army before serving the Americans as president. They were from both the Republican and Democrat camps. Another five star general, General George C Marshall, own the Nobel Prize for formulating European Recovery Plan. Ex-Artillery Colonel Harry S Truman made the most bold and decisive decisions for honour and pride of the US. This simple living democrat soldier was termed 'AN HONEST PRESIDENT' something the Americans can dream of only of now. He lived with 'Honour and Pride' and he never served for money after retirement. General Douglas MacArthur, a most competent engineer officer was the symbol of Americans pride. He had the highest commands out of the homeland. He believed, proved and spoke 'old soldiers never die, they just fade away.'

Due to modernization, in the 21st century the profile of soldiering has changed. The society is now materialistic that falls under the Napoleon's hypothesis of fear and interest that drives the people to work. Of course a motivated people are free from those. An analysis on the nationalism and religion unveils that people or countries that are religious are more nationalistic. This was Samuel P Huntington's assumption and it is the most accurate and true for Bangladesh Army.

Most of our people are religious. Family and social values are strictly followed in our army. Therefore, a cursory view of it may be misleading especially when religion is linked negatively with conservatism. Since good soldiering requires high level of morality, good character quality and wisdom, therefore, our approach is worthy. The visible outcome that Bangladesh Army enjoys is that it has been ranked high by the UN. And the profile of our army and the senior leaderships are distinctive, especially on discipline and loyalty towards the superiors and the country.

Universally, leadership is top down that portrays the profile of the organization. Therefore, the achievements of Bangladesh Army so far are the result of wisdom, vision and guidance by the senior leadership. However, there are differences with the western philosophy and ours which stems primarily from religion. Due to many reasons Islam has similarity with Confucian philosophy where modest and obedient subordinates are the requirement to uphold the organizational creed. Hence, our leadership acts like both guardians and administrators, provide guidance and punishment (sometimes) as the head of the families. Therefore, such family bonds should sustain and prevail by all means for good. Let us also remember Tolstoy's single family concept and hypothesis on greatness (hero) after death and the mystery thereafter.

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Economic diplomacy between Bangladesh and East Asia

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THE role of economic diplomacy has been transformed in the post cold war era. Trade, market and investment have been promoted through using foreign policy instruments. Now a day, there is a growing realisation that economic relationships have strong impacts on political relationships and these will not be effective until or unless a robust economic diplomacy is pursued by the stake holders. Against this backdrop, Bangladesh foreign policy also has to count on economic diplomacy to have increased access to global markets. Notwithstanding the commitment of the Bangladesh Government to use economic diplomacy as the central strategy to all the diplomatic initiative (Budget Speech, 2009-10, section 261) the performance of Bangladesh in this sector is not so satisfactory. An enhanced economic diplomacy should be pursued to attract investment, utilize and obtain technology along with better management of external economic assistance.

Regional trading partnership is the most common and effective form of economic diplomacy. In this regard, Bangladesh has been maintaining good relationship with the East Asian countries. It has adopted 'Look East Policy' but yet to realize it fully. A detailed and professional economic diplomacy is needed for Bangladesh which can help reap the potential benefits of Bangladesh-East Asia cooperative relations.

In terms of political, economic and cultural relations Bangladesh has been maintaining good ties with the countries

of East Asia from the very beginning. Bangladesh-Japan bilateral relation was established in February, 1972 and Japan has been increasingly and consistently upholding its status as the 'single largest donor' in Bangladesh for four decades. Japan's impact is clearly visible in almost all aspects of Bangladesh's economic development and social transformation. Although Bangladesh is an LDC and small in size, it has enough potential to gain from Bangladesh-Japan cooperative relation if the country pursues an improved economic diplomacy. Our weakness in economic diplomacy in dealing with Japan has been exposed by the issue of Padma Bridge financing. Japan expects a breakthrough in consultation with the World Bank and the ADB as Japan alone cannot finance such a big project. However, the Japan has agreed to consider the Metro Rail Project actively under the 33rd loan package of \$700 million.



In case of Bangladesh-China relations, we can see that although China did not recognise Bangladesh initially, China and

Bangladesh established diplomatic relations in 1975, and once ties were established both nations have come closer over the years. Now, Bangladesh has become one of the largest trade partners of China in South Asia. Bangladesh maintains a very close relationship with China for its economic and military needs and over the

years, the two sides have signed a number of bilateral agreements that range from economic engagements, soft loans, social contracts, cultural exchanges, academic interactions, infrastructure development and military procurement. China-Bangladesh cooperation could work better if Chinese investment for establishing backward linkage industries in the field of textile and clothing could be attracted through a proactive economic diplomacy.

Bangladesh has also good bilateral relations with South Korea which is now considered one of the economic tigers of Asia. The growing relationship between the private sectors of these two countries is the most encouraging development in these bilateral relations the two. South

Korea's investment and business opportunities in Bangladesh are on the increase and South Korea has been a significant development partner in Bangladesh. Many joint ventures in Bangladesh's Export Processing Zones (EPZ) have been set up by Korean investors and South Korea is reportedly the largest foreign investor in the EPZs. But the matter of regret is that there are more than 1, 30,000 Bangladeshi foreign workers in the country among whom significant numbers are illegal immigrants. The two governments should talk on this issue and resolve the problem of illegal migrants otherwise this can create impediments in the bilateral relations.

Each of the governments of the East Asian countries has played a decisive role in development by engineering economic miracle, and Bangladesh can learn a lot from them for our development. Especially, it can emulate the Korean model to grasp its economic potential as the economic situation and also the level of development of Korea in the 1960s were at par with Bangladesh. A more developed relation with this region can lead Bangladesh to have a rapid economic growth and industrialization. However, Bangladesh already has an excellent relation with East Asia therefore the cooperative relations between Bangladesh and East Asia will develop more if the economic diplomacy could be practiced properly by Bangladesh and by doing so, these evolving relations between Bangladesh and East Asia could be materialized into an instrument to achieve the foreign policy objectives of Bangladesh.

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