

# Abe visit as a catalyst for Bangladesh's "Look East Policy"

IFTY ISLAM

IT is difficult to overemphasise the economic significance and opportunity for Bangladesh presented by the upcoming State Visit to Dhaka by Japanese PM Shinzo Abe on September 6 and 7. The Honourable PM Hasina concluded a successful trip to Japan in May and secured commitments from the Japanese Government for up to Y 600bn (\$ 5.9bn) in economic assistance over the next 5 years that will be focused primarily on a number of high profile infrastructure projects. Indeed there have already been two high level Japanese delegations here already on Aug 18 and Aug 21 from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) as well as more than 20 Japanese companies. They discussed potential modalities for large-scale energy projects such as the 1200MW proposed coal-fired power plant in Matabari 65 km south of Chittagong as well as a Ganges barrage, building multi-modal tunnels under the Jamuna River, a railway bridge over the Jamuna River, a multi-modal Dhaka eastern bypass, and the ecological restoration of four rivers around Dhaka. With Bangladesh's infrastructure deficit estimated to be costing the country up to 1.5 % of GDP growth annually, Japanese technological expertise, project management as well as financing in infrastructure space is clearly extremely valuable.

However, it is in the area of export diversification, both by product and by region, that PM Abe's visit is perhaps equally important. Ready Made Garments (RMG) accounts for 80% of merchandise exports and there has been a broad consensus for the need to fast-track the development of "the next wave of RMGs" namely sectors that have substantial export growth potential and leverage the country's large pool of underutilised labour.

We are already seeing encouraging signs of growth in Leather Goods and Footwear, but in other sectors as diverse as shipbuilding, light electronic manufacturing/assembly, bicycles and even agro businesses, attracting Japanese companies to establish operations in Bangladesh would catalyse and accelerate the development of such industries and reduce time frame for such industries to reach critical mass not only in terms of introducing global best practices and innovation/Research and Development, but also access to many new markets. While we all admire South Korea's economic miracle and global dominant manufacturing

giants such as Samsung and LG, Japanese companies also played an important role in technology transfer to Korea in the 1970s and 1980s, most notably in the auto sector as well as electronics. In the past decade Japan and South Korea have played a similar role in Vietnam with the result that one Samsung mobile assembly factory alone is producing almost \$ 20bn of exports for Vietnam, almost as large as Bangladesh's total RMG exports.

The Japan visit can also help Bangladesh leverage its geographic position between China and Japan and adjacency to ASEAN. The Japanese government and corporate Japan have already committed to large scale investments in Bangladesh's neighbouring country Myanmar, including the Thilawa Special Economic Zone at a port near Yangon, although the \$5bn debt forgiveness by Japan and proposed new investments still lag China's more than \$14bn of investments.

Rather than seeing Myanmar as a competitor, Bangladesh's Government should seek closer relations as expanding economic opportunities for both countries. Indeed following PM Hasina's Tokyo visit in May, perhaps the most notable section of Prime Minister Abe's statement was that "Bangladesh has great economic potential. In order to realise its potential and expedite further growth, Japan has come up with the concept of the Bay of Bengal industrial growth belt..." or what he termed "The BIG-B." Interestingly, China is thinking along similar lines with Chinese President Xi Jinping. Xi describing Bangladesh as an important country along the "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR) project that he has been championing, which envisages deepening connectivity, building ports and free trade zones, and boosting trade with other countries in the Indian Ocean region and in Southeast Asia.

India itself has recognised the importance of its relationship with Japan with PM Modi on a 5-day State Visit to Tokyo and Kyoto that began on Aug 30. The so-called "bromance" between PM Modi and Abe was evidenced by the former's series of communications on twitter to his Japanese counterpart ahead of his trip including a comment that "Am particularly excited to meet PM@AbeSino. I deeply respect his leadership and enjoy a warm relationship with him from previous meetings." There is clearly a greater geopolitical importance to his trip as they try and counterbalance China's growing assertiveness in the past year in the South China Sea in the case of Japan or alleged incursions by China in the

Himalayas in the case of India. India looks also to seek a nuclear agreement along the lines of its 2008 deal with the US to import nuclear fuel and technology. Japan will look for reassurances on India's commitment not to use this for military purposes. India will also to double FDI from Japan and seek assistance in developing a high speed railway network. Japan conversely will want to reach agreement on the import of rare earth metals to diversify its reliance away from China.

Returning to the Bangladesh-Japan opportunity, the key to our ability to capitalise on the PM Abe State Visit is sensitivity to the objectives and interests of Japanese companies, finding solutions to their concerns in areas such as land procurement, energy supplies, and taxation problems for intermediate goods and business facilitation. Vietnam adopted its "Doi Moi" economic policies over the past two decades to transition to market economy and attract FDI. It is in Bangladesh's interest to develop a "Look East Policy" (LEP) that will accelerate our economic relations with other countries in Asia. The key elements of this are fourfold: 1) Investment: Including the right modalities for economic zones and engage in thorough research to do a sector mapping for each country to see which are the most likely sectors and indeed JV partners for FDI.; 2) Trade: an assessment should be made on our import and export mix. Do we produce the range/mix of products that for example are in demand in China, Japan or Korea? What is the tariff structure for import of their products? Perhaps reduced tariffs or duties on their imports can facilitate greater market access for our products?; 3) Regional Connectivity: Developing BCIM (Bangladesh, China, India Myanmar) economic corridor or likewise Japan's "Big-B" proposal. 4) Infrastructure.

The RMG sector has already benefitted massively from the China Relocation Trade as companies have been shifting factories from higher labour costs in China. The Bangladesh government should ensure effective follow up to the Abe visit to capitalise on Bangladesh's geographic position as a new re-export and logistics hub in the region for Japanese companies. This remains, in my view, the key to the economy achieving 7%+ growth on a sustained basis. Let's "Look East" and look forward to a new phase of Bangladesh's economic development.

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## The polit(r)ics of silence

QUAZI MOSIUR RAHMAN

LET us start by describing two pertinent issues. First, a politically cognisant teacher frequently asks a question to a new group of students to know how many of them would like to be politically conscious beings. Most often the all pervading silence conveys a big 'NO' to politics. The second issue, couple of days ago we witnessed a tragic launch accident. Even the 'submerged mass coffin', Pinak-6, could not be traced out. Sadly, people became sympathetically silent with no drive to challenge this mass murder. In this way, every day many nerve-wrecking incidents occur, but people remain in psychopathological paralysis. Is this phenomenon of silence natural or politically induced? In fact, one of the prominent social scientists Fredric Jameson claims, "political perspective is the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation." Edward Said, the great intellectual, activist and think-tank of Palestinian liberation movement, senses the same, no knowledge is apolitical. Therefore, digging deeper in to the prevalent politics of silence is in order.

First of all, a bourgeois state does not want its citizens to be critically disposed. That is why it tries to stifle the intellectual and humane growth of its citizenry. It was historically perceived by Buddha and Confucius. According to their understanding, the true purpose of the state machineries is to make people intellectually inadequate so that they become servile and never dare to face up to the authority.

To add, the modern state, in collaboration with corporate capitalism manufactures 'disimagination machine', the term used by Georges Didi-Huberman, to castigate critical and intellectually vibrant human beings. At this moment, mainstream politics and collective consciousness devalue reason. People are blindly following, without any sensible and rational question, those beliefs, custom and lifestyles that they are structured to follow.

In that society collective memory is under severe grip of amnesia. People are constructed to possess, if not blank slate, only fragmented dots of history. It becomes possible mainly through a mechanism that presents history to young people as a boring subject with only clusters of some dry dates and events. That does not mean it gets itself detached from history, rather this mechanism emotionally markets historical events via advertisements. In this regard, in Bangladesh the advertisement of mobile phone companies, banks and insurance companies are of relevance. Consequently, people remain apathetic towards in-depth understanding of historical achievements. For example, throughout the world, mass movements barely carry any legacy of golden historical events. Rather they are to follow fresh starts without organized leadership and vivid vision. People are kept aloof because in history there lie dormant some potential antidotes of all kinds of oppression and exploitation.

Not only this, critical thinking which gives impetus to look deeper into any phenomenon has been brutally exiled from academic institutions. Also, studying in other than ones mother tongue, as many seminal researches have proved, reinforces the intellectual sterilization of students. The gradual sterilization leads to commoditization of education which is now so pervasive in Bangladesh. It is because this country unquestionably tries to follow the prescription of international financial institutions which work as the public relation officers of mercantile capitalism, which grounds on skilled labourer and not on freedom loving human beings. Hence, a faulty semester system and purely a GPA driven generation tends to prevail in the leadership of this country. At present, students are allured to study market motivated subjects which are sceptic about greater humane qualities like love, kindness, care, prudence, patience, selflessness etc. Likewise, teachers are encouraged to become mere facilitators or instructors, in other words, corporate executives and not 'Gurus' in terms of being philosopher-guides. These trends in education can be identified as an insidious 'war against thought'.

In addition, there are also endeavours of capitalist culture to depoliticize people. Here is a widely propagated idea -- 'nasty' politics is for 'nasty' people. This is why 'good' students should refrain from politics. Regrettably, people barely understand that politics does not refrain from entangling their lives any way. This depoliticizing appears to be dominant when ubiquitous consumer culture designs and preaches a very standardized archetype of a good citizen, to differently put, a naive consumer. Herbert Marcuse substantiates this idea by introducing necessary features of 'One dimensional man' of consumer society whose aptitude and ability for critical thinking withers away. Thus, an over encompassing passivity prevails. Pleasure through consumption exists to be the ultimate destination behind all initiatives.

As a consequence, political and corporate disorder perpetuates. Exploitation of the common man goes unchallenged. Equitability and justice are denied. People, for psychological relief, take refuge in fanatic belief and practices. Fatalistic outlook of life tends to determine collective consciousness. As a whole, dehumanization appears to cripple common lives.

In turn, a new Rana Plaza will collapse, hundreds of wage earners will return to the motherland in coffins, public leaders will be burnt alive, law enforcing agencies will slaughter another seven, 'minorities' will suffer, and so on. Accordingly, news agencies will publish stories, authorities will torrentially pour commitments for 'justice', a few organizations will form human chains, and the people will wait for a more traumatic event to forget the previous one.

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# Ebola – the failures of the international outbreak response

THOMAS NIERLE &amp; BRUNO JOCHUM

DEAD bodies in the street, families wiped out, dozens of health care workers infected, hospitals shut down and panic and mistrust in the eyes of the people in the streets. This is what Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) usually sees in countries that are ravaged by war, but in Sierra Leone, Liberia and - to a lesser extent - Guinea, it is Ebola that is generating immense, public distress.

As of today more than 1,427 patients have succumbed to Ebola viral disease and the care centres established by Médecins Sans Frontières are overwhelmed. On 8 August, far too late, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Ebola epidemic a public health emergency of international concern. However, it had been officially declared in West Africa since March 2014.

The disaster is becoming even more dramatic as the health systems in the affected region have imploded. Patients are dying of Ebola, but also of malaria, diarrhoea or complicated deliveries due to the absence of effective medical care. In Liberia especially, hospitals are deserted. And fear is spreading.

MSF has been responding to the crisis since March 2014. We have opened up more and more isolation centres throughout the affected countries to care for the sick and we have assisted the communities. For the last three months, we have actively been calling for more hands-on assistance to control the epidemic and to provide the best possible care to patients.

However, the international response is slow and derisory. It can equally be defined as irresponsible. Today, only a handful of international actors are engaged in the fight against Ebola. But this is nowhere

near enough. This is an exceptional crisis, the number of new infections is still on the rise, and the virus has a serious potential to spread to other countries.

Promises of funding and political statements are not sufficient – decisive action is needed now. Case finding must be intensified, more isolation centres have to be set up, epidemiological surveillance and laboratory capacity have to be reinforced, contact tracing and follow-up must be strengthened, communities must be sensitised, experienced staff and training are needed in the field, and general health services must be reopened: these activities must be properly coordinated inside and beyond the borders of the affected countries. This necessitates a hands-on, operational approach.

The situation can only be reversed if there is a significant commitment of states with available effective disaster response capacity - be it through civil protection mechanisms, the support of military medicine units or of logistics or medical staff who are used to working with strict infection prevention and control measures.

The successive closure of international borders including air travel renders our efforts increasingly difficult. Infected medical personnel cannot be evacuated anymore – another layer of collective irresponsibility. The international community must ensure that those who try to contain the outbreak can enter and leave the affected countries if need be. A functional system of medical evacuation has to be set up urgently.

Why is it that the international community is largely relying on the very fragile health systems in the affected countries to manage an international health crisis of this scope? And why are they entrusting global health security to private organisations that have, by nature, limited capacities to respond to major outbreaks? It is irresponsible to place exclusive management of such a

devastating, deadly epidemic on the back of overwhelmed nations such as Sierra Leone and Liberia while praying that the private sector is filling the gaps left by the shortfalls of its health system.

MSF has accumulated significant experience in dealing with Ebola outbreaks over the last 20 years. During the same period, operational capacities in the United Nations system have been gradually reduced through reforms. For example, the restructuring of the World Health Organization in Geneva has led to the closure of its viral hemorrhagic fever unit. Member states should be held accountable for an unceasing reduction of response capacity. A destructive spiral has materialised, leading to what we see today: lack of leadership, deficient coordination and, last but not least, a striking absence of operational capacity. This is compounded by the fact that the international community simply doesn't feel responsible for responding to what is happening in regions that are not perceived as politically or economically interesting.

Crises that are threatening global health security demand a commitment from all states. Once this commitment is ensured, response capacity can be built around either existing or newly established institutions or networks.

It is shortsighted of developed nations to limit their response to the potential arrival of one infected patient on their territory. If the aim is to avoid further spread of the epidemic, we have to control transmission of the virus. And this is only possible by caring for patients in West Africa.

Today and again, Médecins Sans Frontières asks for more – not more lip service, but more action.

The writers are President of MSF Switzerland and General Director of MSF Switzerland, respectively.

## BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



## HENRY

by Don Trachte



## CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

**ACROSS**

- Ship spars
- "World War Z" star
- Bride-to-be's agreement, for short
- Plot unit
- Become depleted
- Brightly colored
- Include
- Easy two-pointer
- Final, for one
- Compliant
- Composer Satie
- Nasty dog
- Counter workers
- Big truck
- Traffic marker
- Football team
- Years gone by
- Chopped finely
- The present
- Crystal gazer
- Make definite, as plans
- Samovars
- Tempt
- Spot
- Frittered away

**DOWN**

- Jack of rhyme
- Priggish person
- Tears apart
- Put down in writing
- Game round
- Mole, for one
- Irrational fear
- Chipping tool
- Cressida's love
- Sawbuck
- Game piece
- Burgundy city
- Entered Indy
- "Ama-deus" role
- Words under the Lincoln Memorial
- Does the news
- Against
- Bard's creation
- Let on
- Pasta topper
- Used a keyboard
- Singer Turner
- Handful of

**Yesterday's answer**

M O P U P L O P E S  
E R A S E A V A N T  
W I S E R T A S T Y  
L O S U G H S I L  
E L I S U E I C E  
D E N T A L O N E S  
G O L F B A G  
M A T E W A F T E D  
A S H T A R H U E  
D I E E R R E R A  
C A B L E A B H O R  
A G A I N G O A P E  
P O R T S E N T E R

**QUOTABLE Quote**

*Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude.*

Denis Waitley

**CRYPTOQUOTE** 7-15

LRC EVHL DVEEVI ANF  
BCVBQC ZMJC WB LRCMT  
BVCT MH KF LRMIUMIZ  
LRCFOVI'LRNJCNIIE  
-- NQMDC ANQUCT

**AXYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: WE ARE TIED TO THE OCEAN. AND WHEN WE GO BACK TO THE SEA, WHETHER IT IS TO SAIL OR TO WATCH - WE ARE GOING BACK FROM WHEN WE CAME.

-- JOHN F. KENNEDY

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