

6th ISPCAN Asian Regional Conference
Outline of Remarks by Dean Kishore Mahbubani
16 November 2005

- I) Welcome
- II) Stress lack of qualification...not an expert in this field. So I can contribute in
3 WAYS:
 - (a) Message of hope: in my life, I came from a relatively underprivileged
childhood. Singapore was very different then (examples). Therefore, it
can be done. Singapore was able to change.
 - (b) Share Asian experience: fastest increase in living standards in recent time
has been in Asia. Children have benefited. Why has this happened in
Asia? Why has it not happened in other countries?
 - (c) Share UN experience: Chaired a UN Security Council session on children
in conflict

- Goal of protecting children has become universal goal:

World Summit 2005: Children's Rights¹

“141. We express dismay at the increasing number of children involved in and affected by armed conflict, as well as all other forms of violence, including domestic violence, sexual abuse and exploitation and trafficking. We support cooperation policies aimed at strengthening national capacities to improve the situation of those children and to assist in their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

¹ World Summit 2005 Outcome Document:
<http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=164>

142. We commit ourselves to respecting and ensuring the rights of each child without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status of the child or his or her parent(s) or legal guardian(s). We call upon States to consider as a priority becoming a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

III) I PROPOSE to address 3 questions in my remarks:

(A) Why have some Asian societies succeeded?

(B) What lesson can we learn from Asian experience?

(C) What challenges do Asian societies face?

(IV) (A): **Why have Asian societies succeeded?** (Answer is controversial for this Children’s conference since it will involve politics and economics). To be able to save millions of children at a time, you need to get the political and economic policies right.

(1) JAPAN : crucial role : created ripple effects in Asia

a. Beginning with the Meiji restoration (1800s)

b. Followed by the rise of the Four Tigers, Southeast Asia, China and India

c. Shared two stories on how Japan has inspired China and India

Message: Find a country or two, convert them, and other nations will follow

(2) Benign Post-WWII Role of USA :

3 benefits: (a) Sharing the American Dream: destroying feudalism of Asia

- Before it was accepted that your destiny is determined at birth (caste, class, etc.), now children believe they can make a better life – especially because of the interaction between Asia and the U.S.

- Story of the statue of the American soldier in Hokkaido and the inscription that said “Boys be ambitious.”

(b) More students are educated in America:

- Asia sends the largest number of students to US universities among other regions – around 57% of international students come from Asia as of 2004.
- Four of the top 5 countries are from Asia (in order – India, China, Rep. of Korea, Japan and Canada)
- For the last 3 years India has sent the most students, climbing by 7% (to a total of 79,736) in 2004 over the last year
- China is the second largest at 61, 765 students

(c) There are many other things the US has contributed but I will only mention a few.

(3) Arrival of a tidal wave of common sense: realization that it is time to focus on economic development.

- With the size and diversity of Asia, there was not one single path taken, they found their own answers

- China and India are very different but both are successful

- Then the reason for the change is much deeper, beyond political beliefs

(B)What lessons can be learned from Asians experience, especially in the promotion if children welfare?

Two big lessons:

(i) To improve children's welfare, promote economic development.

- story about how Jim Grant from UNICEF mentioned that what is more spectacular than the economic rise of Singapore, is how Singapore lowered its infant mortality rate faster than any other society.

- Infant mortality statistics are one of the best indicators of the state of well-being of society. FIRST sign of trouble of Soviet Union came with statistics showing the increasing infant mortality rate.

- Soviet Union: The infant mortality rate, which had plunged from 80.7 per 1000 live births in 1950 to 22.9 per 1000 in 1971, rose to 27.3 per 1000 in 1980, and dropped somewhat to 25.4 per 1000 in 1987

-Economic development has led to other improvements. Examples:

- India: Since the 1970s, India's economic growth rate has risen, poverty has declined, and social indicators have improved. The average life expectancy at birth has increased from 49 years to the current 63 years. Important achievements have been made in health and education. Infant mortality fell from 80 per 1000 live births in 1990, to 69 in 2000. The enrollment of primary school-aged children rose from 68 percent in 1992/1993 to 82 percent at the end of the decade.

- China reached the World Summit for Children goal of reducing malnutrition in children under-five by half from 1990-2000, which gave East Asia and the Pacific the largest decline of underweight levels in that decade.(UNICEF, 2001).
- However, the work is not over. The largest pools of poverty are in Asia:
 - 621 million or 19.3 % of developing Asia’s population live on less than \$1 a day (ADB, 2003).
 - This is a sharp decrease from 922 million or 34.3% in 1990.
 - More than one-fourth of the children in Asia are living in absolute poverty and almost half of them are seriously deprived (Plan International)
 - Asia accounts for over 60% of all child laborers (UNDP, March 2004)
 - Estimated that one-third of the global trafficking trade of women and children are trafficked annually from Southeast Asia (IOM, 2000)

(ii) To protect children we need to prevent war

Effects of war on children

- a. War plays a role in worsening the situation for children - the estimated rise in the under-five mortality rate during a ‘typical’ five-year war is 13%
- b. Nearly half of the 3.6 million people killed in war since 1990 have been children
- c. An estimated 300,000 child soldiers - boys and girls under the age of 18 – are involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide

- d. More than 2 million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict over the last decade
- e. At least 6 million have been permanently disabled or seriously injured
- f. Estimated 20 million children forced to flee their homes because of conflict and human rights violations
- g. Around 8,000 to 10,000 children are killed or maimed by landmines every year
- h. Of the 25 countries with the highest proportion of children orphaned by AIDS, about 1/3 have been affected by armed conflict in recent years
- i. Of the 10 countries with the highest rates of under-5 deaths, seven are affected by armed conflict

(C) Against this backdrop, what challenges do Asian societies face?

(i) To achieve zero prospect of war

(a) Southeast Asia: Balkan of Asia (variety of religion, race, and cultures)

-> Good news: achieved zero war, which is a remarkable achievement ... Now spread to East Asia ...

- It's remarkable how silent the guns have become in Asia. No wars since 1990 (15 yrs) even though 3 biggest wars fought in East Asia -> Korean War, Vietnam War and Sino – Vietnamese War

War statistics:

- a. China Civil War – 3.1 million
- b. Korean War – 2.8 million

- c. Second Indochina War – 3.5 million
 - i. Includes the Vietnam War – 1.7 million
- d. Bangladesh – 1.25 million
- e. Cambodia, Khmer Rouge - 1.65 million

Q: Where does Asia stand in the possibility of war?

- rising political temperatures: debates between Japan & China, and Japan & Korea, arguments over history can become arguments of the future
- Asia's weakness is the reluctance to address these issues squarely and ask: When will you stop these arguments?
- This has got to stop – time to look towards economic improvement
 - e.g. When I was in the UN Council: visit to Burundi (ethnic tension), Rwanda (thousands of memorials), Liberia (primary school with shrapnel holes, 80 students in a class without blackboards, etc.)

(ii) **To create institutions of compassion**

(a) Almost all major relief agencies are western:

e.g. Liberia – had a modern clean hospital run by MSF.

There are few or even no Asian global institutions of compassion. This needs to be addressed. Why is Asia so slow?

(b) Lessons from recent disasters

Tsunami ->

- Around 82% of pledges of tsunami aid (including private donations) came from Western countries (approximately US\$ 5 billion)

Paradoxically, we need to develop military capabilities. Strong modern military made a difference

- most effective external response during crisis came from American, Australian and Singapore Armed Forces.
- South Asia Earthquake -> Aid delivery came from military mechanisms

(iii) To achieve social safety nets

Challenge for Asian societies is to create social safety nets to help those at the bottom, especially children at the very bottom, without creating the welfare dependency that has become the bane of European societies.

(iv) To develop civil society organizations.

Every society needs to develop civil society organizations, like the Singapore Children's Society.

Conclusion

One last key point: There is a big shift happening internationally. Norms in the field are moving. The Recent 2005 summit declaration broke new ground with concept of "Responsibility to Protect." It is not only a country's responsibility to protect its people, including its children, but now it is an international obligation.