

It's Bad

It is said that the Japanese prime minister was asked: "What is the secret of Japan's technological advancement?" The prime minister replied: "We gave the teacher the salary of a minister, the immunity of a diplomat, and the homage of an emperor."

I actually take that with a pinch of salt. I checked Google; the average monthly salary of a Japanese elementary teacher is around US\$ 4,100. It's surely better than the US\$ 700 to 800 our teachers earn, but it's hardly the salary of a Japanese minister. No doubt the immunity and the homage bits are an exaggeration too. In fact, I believe that someone made the whole thing up for propaganda reasons! Nevertheless, the fact remains that in Japan, teaching is a respected profession, and teachers have traditionally been paid better than other civil servants. Annual teachers' wages in Japan exceed their counterparts in the 34 OECD* countries by US\$ 8,000 to 9,000 annually. Japan actually comes in fifth place among countries with the best-paid teachers, after Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, and Korea.

As I write this piece, Palestinian teachers in the West Bank are still on strike. The word is that the strike will continue till the end of February. On February 23, many thousands of teachers demonstrated in front of our prime minister's office in Ramallah, demanding better working conditions. In a nutshell, they are not able to make ends meet. Sadly, possibly simplistically, the government doesn't have the means to meet the teachers' demands. It promised them last year to do so, but it was not able to keep its promise. The security forces who tried to prevent the demonstration from taking place only infuriated the teachers who felt their dignity was being tampered with. News has it that 20 teachers were arrested, which in turn angered the general public. Emotions currently are running high and social media is on fire! It's bad.

I wish the bad news were restricted to the educational sector. Truth is it's everywhere. The dire economic situation is taking its toll, and we could very well witness in the near future even more intense demonstrations similar to the one that took place on the 23rd. To call a spade a spade, everybody, well almost everybody, is doing badly. One clear indicator of this is the fact that Palestinians are borrowing more and more from the banks. For more bad news, please tune in to you name it!

A way out? Submission to an imposed political solution. Money will then pour in. Economic independence, as Netanyahu would like, in other words. It's all connected; it's all politics. And to me, it's all the fault of occupation. The possibility of submission happening? Almost nil. Good or bad, it's not a Palestinian trait. Neither is giving up.

Trying to end this on a positive note. I've gone blank. Maybe next column!

* Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

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