

EDITOR'S VIEW

Learning life lessons from the Japanese

THERE was a moment in the Rugby World Cup that illustrated why the hosts have done so well in this tournament.

It was in the game with Ireland. One of the Japanese players lifted the leg of an Irish ball carrier.

It seemed, for a moment, as though he would drive the Irishman to the ground. If he had, it would have been deemed a dangerous tackle.

The result would have been a penalty and a card. Instead, the nearest Japanese player stepped in and provided support to the Irishman. In keeping with both the spirit and the laws of the game, the two Japanese players then returned the Irishman to the ground.

Japan would go on to beat the Irish who, at the start of the tournament, were ranked first.

This display of discipline and respect for others is ingrained in Japanese culture, and is evident in how their team plays.

Japan has taken part in every World Cup, since the inaugural tournament in 1987, and has not received a single red card.

In the current tournament, they have gone through the knock-out stages without receiving a single yellow card.

There are two other traits that have made the Japanese team the force that they are: they strive for perfection and never give up.

The traits displayed by the Japanese are not limited to the rugby field. And neither is their success as a nation.

Japan has one of the largest and most developed economies in the world. As a result, the Japanese people are well off and, generally, enjoy a high quality of life.

Levels of inequality are low as are levels of corruption.

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index of 2016, which is put together by Transparency International, Japan was placed 20th from 176 countries. South Africa came in at 64th.

The culture of respect found in Japan is beginning to take root at the Rugby World Cup.

Several teams have adopted the practice of the Brave Blossoms (the Japanese national team), who bow to spectators in a show of appreciation at the end of matches.

New Zealand set the trend after their victory over South Africa in the group stages.

More recently, Springbok hooker Schalk Brits became a hit on social media when he bowed to thank the ballboy, who handed him the rugby ball during the game against Canada.

On Sunday, the Springboks are likely to give the Japanese a lesson in rugby.

But there are many life lessons we should learn from the Japanese.

The Quote

In family life, love is the oil that eases friction, the cement that binds closer together, and the music that brings harmony.

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Do not underestimate US's move against the Guptas

How Magnitsky Act was borne out of death and corruption

JUGGERNAUT



KANTHAN PILLAY

"THE best laid schemes o' mice an' men / Gang aft a'gley", Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote.

Legend has it that Burns was ploughing a field and accidentally destroyed a mouse's nest, which it needed to survive the winter. So he wrote *To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest With the Plough, November, 1785*.

Today, we refer to this as the law of unintended consequences – intervention in complex systems creates unanticipated outcomes.

But the more I think about it, the more convinced I become that it is human emotion that triggers such outcomes.

For example, in Hindu legend, Ravana's lust for Sita led to his downfall. Greed led to King Midas turning his beloved daughter into a statue of gold. Envy led to Cain killing Abel in the book of Genesis.

But we hardly stop to consider that positive human sentiment can have equally powerful consequences. One such trait is friendship.

And it was a friendship between an American businessman and a Russian lawyer more than a decade ago that had devastating consequences this week for our most notorious immigrant family, the Guptas of Saxonwold.

The story goes back to 1996 when William Felix Browder at age 32 founded Hermitage Capital Management, an investment fund and asset management company specialising in Russian markets. Between 1996 and 2007, the Hermitage Fund delivered a 2 697% return.

It's an astonishing achievement, but what's more startling is that Browder's fund



HERMITAGE Capital chief executive officer William Browder, left, and his friend, lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who died in jail. | REUTERS and AP



did this in part by focusing on exposure of corporate corruption in the companies in which it invested.

Think about it. If we know that a company indulges in corrupt or risky business practices, we will regard it as less valuable than a trusted company.

By exposing such behaviour and weeding out corruption, Browder automatically boosted the value of those companies. This included Russia's largest company Gazprom.

The exposure of corruption was to be Hermitage's downfall. In 2005, Browder was blacklisted by the Russian government as a threat to national security and deported back to the UK.

A year and a half later, Hermitage Capital's offices in Moscow were raided by Russia's Interior Ministry. They also raided the Moscow office of Browder's US law firm, Firestone Duncan, seizing the corporate registration documents for Hermitage's investment holding companies.

Browder assigned Sergei Magnitsky, head of the tax practice at Firestone Duncan, to investigate the purpose of the raid.

Magnitsky discovered that while those documents were in the custody of the police, they had been used to fraudulently reregister Hermitage's holding companies to the name of an ex-convict.

In October 2008, Magnitsky testified to the circumstances of the fraud to the Russian State Investigative Committee.

Five weeks later, Magnitsky was arrested at his home by the very officers he testified against.

Magnitsky spent 11 months in custody, during which time he was tortured and denied medical attention. On December 16, 2009, he was beaten with rubber batons and tossed into an isolation cell. He was later found dead in his cell.

Incensed at the death of his friend, Browder devoted himself to lobbying US authorities to take action against the perpetrators.

So in 2012, Democrat Senator Benjamin Cardin and Republican Senator John McCain, in a rare show of bipartisan unity, put forward the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability bill.

The bill, targeting Russians thought to be complicit in Magnitsky's death, had two major objectives. The first was to deny them entry to the US. The second was to disconnect those individuals from the global banking system.

The global banking system is controlled by the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (Swift). It is headquartered in Belgium, but is effectively controlled by the US as all dollar-based currencies are subject to Washington's approval. This allows the US to enforce sanctions against countries such as Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela who then cannot send or receive money to third parties.

This Magnitsky Act, signed into law by President Barack Obama, extended such sanctions to these Russian individuals.

In his final days in office, Obama extended the bill to sanction individuals implicated in human rights abuses anywhere in the world. Subsequent to that, other countries passed their own versions of the Magnitsky Act, including Estonia, Canada, Australia and the UK.

Fast-forward to October 10, 2019; the US Treasury announced it had brought these sanctions on members of a "significant corruption network" in South Africa that leveraged overpayments on government contracts, bribery, and other corrupt acts to fund political contributions and influence government actions.

The specific individuals designated were Ajay Gupta, Atul Gupta, Rajesh Gupta, and Salim Essa.

We should not underestimate the significance of this move. The Trump administration would not have arbitrarily undertaken such a move without behind the scenes lobbying by President Cyril Ramaphosa's government.

I expect what will now follow will be the inclusion of those names on the Magnitsky lists of other countries too. There will be few places left where the Guptas will be able to travel, and no way to spend their billions.

But consider this: none of this would have happened if corrupt Russians had not murdered Browder's friend, spurring him to push for the Magnitsky Act.

Srikanthan is one of the names of Vishnu. Another name for Vishnu is Jagannath, "the unstoppable force", which gives us the modern word juggernaut. Kanthan Pillay writes about understanding the unstoppable forces which shape our lives in technology, commerce, science and society.

Woltemade's bravery versus heroism of the Padavatan Six



YOGIN DEVAN

ODDLY enough, as I write about Paul Kruger in this column, I realise I am doing so on his 194th birthday.

As a kid of single-digit age, I recall that during the history lesson at primary school, it was drummed into our tiny heads that Oom Paul was born on October 10, 1825, in Bulhoek in the Cape Colony.

What was so significant about this day?

For me, I was thankful to the bearded man because his birthday – Kruger Day – was a public holiday.

I did not know then that the day was used to underline the values and principles of the Afrikaner people. Little wonder then that when the first democratic government took office in 1994, Kruger Day was one of the first apartheid-era public holidays to be given the boot.

Of even less significance was another fact that we were taught about Kruger's early life. The history test question went as follows: "What did Paul Kruger do when he accidentally shot himself in the hand?"

The correct answer was: "He cut off the injured thumb with a pocketknife and treated the wound with turpentine."

How many pupils must have failed a standard and would have had to repeat another year – all because they did not bother to absorb the trifling details of a man who was the personification of Afrikanerdom, had no education apart from the Bible, and believed the Earth was flat.

Who cares whether the Boer leader used turps, Savlon or manja (turmeric powder)?

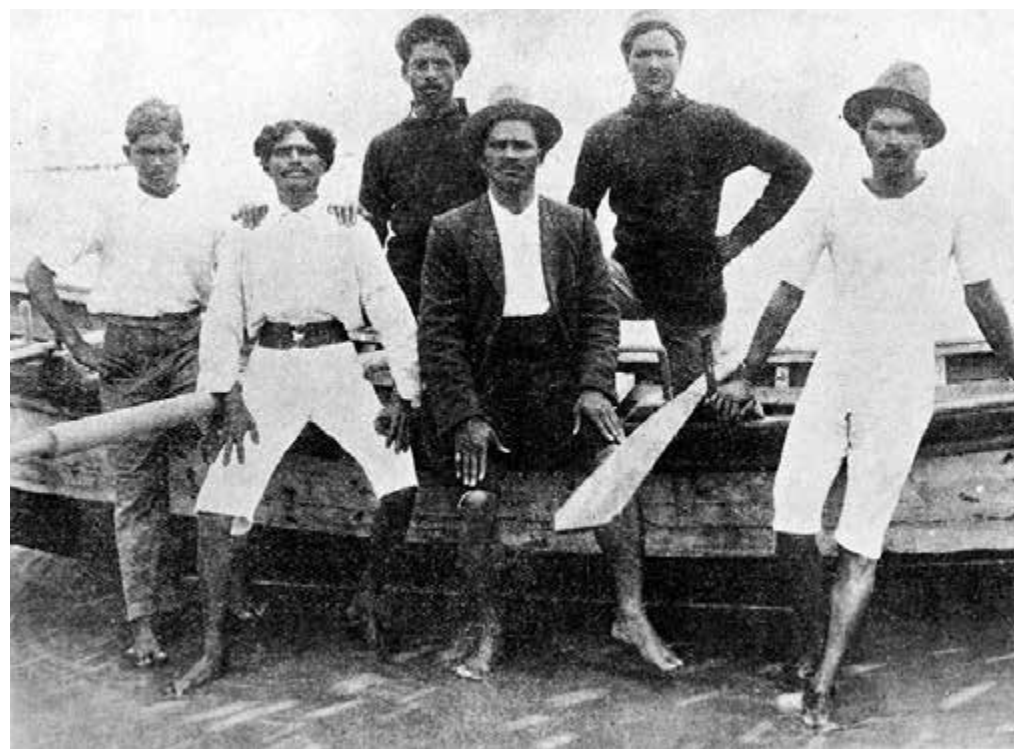
Thinking back now, I realise there were so many other unimportant facts we were forced to internalise – all in the name of the National Party government's propaganda machinery.

We were taught that Rachel de Beer became an Afrikaner heroine in the 1840s for giving her life in order to save that of her brother.

It was the winter of 1843 and one day the family realised that a pet calf, Frikkie, was missing. Rachel, 12, and her 6-year-old brother went searching. When dusk descended and snow started to fall, the children were lost.

Rachel had to save at least her brother's life, even if she had to lay down her own. She took off all her clothes and put them on her brother who survived. Rachel froze to death.

I recall feeling sad that Rachel had died. I admired her for her valour.



THE Padavatan Six helped rescue 176 people when the Umgeni River bank burst in 1917.

Decades later, I learnt that my emotions had been misplaced.

The story of Rachel de Beer may have been fiction and given a deliberate spin – much like the UK PR firm Bell Pottinger's campaign to portray the Gupta family as victims of a conspiracy involving "white monopoly capital".

The Rachel de Beer story surfaced for the first time only shortly after that of the American heroine Hazel Miner. On March 15, 1920, Hazel's school dismissed pupils early because of a blizzard in North Dakota.

Hazel and her two siblings got lost in the snowstorm. When they were found, Hazel was dead, her coat covering the two younger children who were still alive.

Fiction or not, Rachel de Beer is entrenched in South African culture, which is evident by the number of streets and schools named after her, especially in small Free State towns.

Another test question which many history pupils battled with was: "How many people did Wolraad Woltemade save?"

We were taught that on June 1, 1773, the Jonge Thomas, a Dutch East India ship, ran aground in Table Bay. The passengers and sailors on board began falling into the raging sea and many drowned. Wolraad Woltemade rode out to the wreck on horseback. On seven trips he rescued 14 people. On his eighth trip, he and his horse drowned when too many jumped on the poor animal.

Woltemade immediately became a hero. The Dutch East India Company named a ship after him.

The Woltemade Cross for Bravery was instituted as the highest civilian decoration for bravery. The Woltemade Cross was discontinued in 2002 when a new South African honours system was instituted.

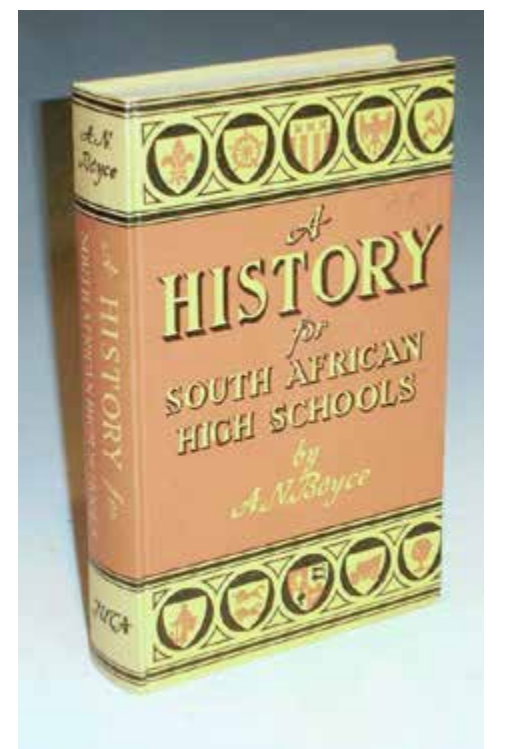
For me, the question that begs is what difference does it make whether 13, 14 or 15 people were rescued? Apart from testing the memory retention of young minds, the history that my generation was taught in school did little to provide us with insight into the cultures of all the people of South Africa, thereby increasing cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

Would it not have been more useful in addition to Woltemade's bravery to have also been taught the in-depth details of the heroism of the Padavatan Six.

On October 28, 1917, when the Umgeni River burst its banks at Springfield Flats (Tintown) in Durban, six seine-netters led by Mariemutho Padavatan saved 176 people from drowning by making five trips into the raging river in an oar-driven banana boat that they used for their everyday fishing.

Unfortunately, my classmates and I were fed a diet of skewed history, which glorified white people, especially Afrikaners, and European politics.

Studying history – without any slant or misinformation – is important because it



A HISTORY textbook used in the 1970s and 1980s.

allows us to understand our past, which in turn allows us to understand our present.

If we want to know how and why our world is the way it is today, we have to look to history for answers.

Kruger's bottle of turpentine shed little light on the cruelty of white supremacy or that the thumbless man was an obstinate guardian of an unjust cause.

Just imagine that when I was taking history lessons in primary and high school, not a word was mentioned about Nelson Mandela who was being incarcerated on Robben Island with scores of other political luminaries who were to later lead South Africa towards bloodless freedom.

If we had studied racism and inequality in its true context, we would be able to better appreciate the importance of social welfare programmes and see why so much effort is being put into creating a system where everyone is equal before the law and has equal access to public amenities.

Taught properly, without bias or prejudice, history is "collective memory" – it shows us who we are as a group: our past, our values and our hopes. Knowing this collective memory is key to becoming an informed citizen. And being an informed citizen is essential to a democratic society.

Devan is a media consultant and social commentator. Share your comments with him on: yogind@meropa.co.za