

# Perspectives

## Clippings



**"PRESIDENT** Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his advisers might have been ignoring Harvard University political economist Francis Fukuyama's book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, when the President denounced capitalism – an inseparable component of liberal democracy – in front of co-operative executives who gathered in Bali recently. Some Muslim leaders are also known for not supporting public accountability. Many kyais (clerics) still mix money meant for their pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) or orphanages with their personal wealth. Although the moderate Muslim groups have not found the equal term for corruption in the Koran and hadith, their view that the crime can be considered risywah (bribery) and a violation of al-amanah al-ammah (public trust) is a good signal. Changing (Muslim) public perception on corruption and then realising it in daily practice will take time. For the meantime, the law enforcers should continue arresting corrupt people, regardless of their political and religious backgrounds."

Ahmad Junaidi, *Jakarta Post*



**"TO END** the vicious cycle of nuclear proliferation, the US, the first to use nuclear bombs as a weapon of war, should apologise to Japan for the bombings and pledge to abandon all nuclear arms. Ichiro Ozawa, leader of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, urged Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, pictured, in a recent policy debate to demand a US apology for the nuclear bombings, but the latter declined. The government can hardly be expected to take such action when the Liberal Democratic Party, during its long rule, has become so cozy with Washington, as demonstrated by the secretive deal on port calls and transit by US nuclear-armed warships."

Kiroku Hanai, *Japan Times*

**What are you doing for National Tree Day?**  
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# More teachers, less truancy

**Outback education needs an injection of resources, writes Kirsten Storry**

**O**NE of the measures Prime Minister John Howard announced last month was that the Government would link income support and family payments to school attendance for all people living on Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory.

School attendance is a chronic problem in the Territory's remote communities. In Maningrida, a large Arnhem Land community, the rate of truancy is reported to be 68 per cent. This means on the average day, only one in three children is at school.

But here's the catch: Remote schools are not ready for an attendance surge that could, in many cases, double their student population. The Northern Territory funds school places based on the number of children who attend during "census" weeks, not on the number of school-aged children in the community and on nearby outstations.

Maningrida, like other remote communities, has neither the desks nor teachers for all community children to attend its school, nor an abundance of spare houses for new teachers.

School attendance is essential for remote community children to have choices and opportunities for economic and social participation inside and outside their communities. But compelling school attendance, without addressing the issues of education supply in remote community schools, will not result in more children getting a good primary school education.

This is because poor attendance is both a cause and a symptom of poor schooling in remote communities. Teaching in remote communities is not for the inexperienced, but their schools are staffed largely with first and second year teachers.

When remote community children arrive at the first year of school, few will have had exposure to spoken English, let alone reading and writing. Most of their parents left school in their early teenage years, if not earlier, without basic literacy and numeracy.



The vast majority of the children will need intensive, systematic, skills-based instruction for several hours each day, but their teachers do not have the training they need in robust phonics instruction. As children grow older, the gap only widens — around nine months for every year at school.

In the short term, cracking down on school attendance will only make the situation worse in remote schools. Teachers will find classrooms filled with children with no history of regular attendance and others who have never been enrolled before.

If the Federal Government is serious about getting results in remote community schools and about merit pay for teachers, now is the time to

exempt remote Territory schools from the centralised teacher allocation system and to run rigorous trials of merit pay in those communities that have large enough primary school enrolments to support a class for each grade level.

Strong leadership will be essential to push through the issues associated with a sudden surge of children who do not perform at grade level.

The Government will need to offer salaries and job packages to attract experienced (or retired) principals to commit to one to two years to rebuild a remote primary school and to give them the autonomy they need to recruit capable, committed teachers.

Many good independent and public

schools in urban areas would be willing to contribute time and expertise to mentor or support principals in remote schools. One option might be for these remote schools to have a school board combining community elders, urban principals and senior executives whose corporations wish to make a difference in young lives as good corporate citizens.

The school boards could assist with running building projects, developing apprentice and internship programs, and making use of new technologies to improve school administration.

Ultimately, the best schools should be allowed to expand. Parents should not be restricted from (that is, lose their welfare payments as a result of) moving to communities with better schools that offer greater choices and opportunities for their children.

**Cracking down on school attendance will only make the situation worse in remote schools**

The schools should be encouraged to run bus services to smaller nearby communities that cannot support a full primary school education.

Where possible, remote schools' infrastructure should also be used more efficiently.

At present, classrooms and facilities are used only for about six hours a day, for 40 weeks of the year. They lie idle during the late afternoons and school holidays when they could hold adult literacy classes or, if necessary, a second shift of school classes while building work is under way.

In particular, special literacy and numeracy classes could cater for those teenagers aged 15 and under who are now required to attend school but do not have the primary school education to attend high school.

If the Federal Government wants to get results from increased school attendance, it urgently needs to improve the supply of education in remote community schools.

Kirsten Storry is a policy analyst on the Indigenous Affairs Research Program at the Centre for Independent Studies

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