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Letters

Oct 7th 2004

From The Economist print edition

The Economist, 25 St James's Street, London SW1A 1HG
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At your service

SIR – Everyone knows that the Japanese are great at manufacturing and awful at services (“[Dead firms walking](#)”, September 25th). But are you entirely fair? Your chart of growth in manufacturing and non-manufacturing is dubious. Your choice of start date—the second quarter of 2002—coincides with the beginning of the recovery from a recession in which manufacturing was hit much harder than services.

For a more optimistic view of the Japanese service sector, get up early on a Saturday morning and watch children's TV. Most of the cartoons are Japanese. Check the videogames that your children play. A little fanciful perhaps but there was a time when the mighty British motorcycle industry laughed at the pitiful efforts of Honda, Yamaha and the like. And where are Norton, Vincent and BSA now?

Jonathan Allum
London

Take the Lo road

SIR – You say that “Vincent Lo's career shows what it takes for an outsider to succeed in China” ([Face value](#), September 25th). Mr Lo's commendable success is the result of his own hard work and he has shown what it takes to succeed in China. But he is not an outsider. A shared ethnicity, language and cultural base are enough for him to be considered one of China's own. When it comes to establishing the social and political ties so crucial to success in China, what an outsider needs most is an insider like Mr Lo.

John Fuhrman
Beijing

Big cat napping

SIR – You are wrong that Jaguar's losses in America result from their making cars that are “expensive and dull” (“[Stuck in the rough](#)”, September 25th). The real reason is a dramatic decrease in the quality of material and construction since the late 1990s. If a high-end carmaker lost sales through expense and dullness, would Lexus fare as well as it does in America? Don't count on the medium-term prospects for Renault and Citroën on returning to America. To the American car buyer, their designs would seem quirky at best and that they are

French cars would make them controversial. The car firm with the better chance of an American comeback is Alfa Romeo.

Gunnar Heinrich
Washington, DC

Defending women's rights

SIR – Douglas Sylva rehashes discredited claims against the United Nations Population Fund ([Letters](#), September 25th). A handpicked team sent to China by the American administration found no evidence that the fund supported coercive abortion. In fact, it reported that the UNFPA had registered strong opposition to such practices. The team also recommended the release by Congress of funds appropriated for the UNFPA. Three other independent teams reached the same conclusion. The panel also documented the fund's efforts to end any "administrative" measures to deter pregnancy. Even the State Department report cited by Mr Sylva concedes that the UNFPA has urged actions towards their elimination.

Safiye Cagar
UNFPA
New York

Thought leadership

SIR – [Charlemagne's](#) analysis of the problems of Europe's universities focuses on the economic and political dimensions of the issue (September 25th). As an American professor who has taught classes at a well-known French university in which both European and American students were enrolled, I must mention the cultural factors at play. While the innate quality of the European students was very high, for the most part their study habits were frightful. Homework seemed a foreign concept, at least until the contrary behaviour of the American students, who actually turned in the completed assignments, proved an example the Europeans elected to emulate.

Furthermore, in America today it is exceedingly rare to find the kind of insular ivory-tower mentality that makes professors in Europe so loth to interact with and keeps them isolated from the realities of their fellow citizens.

David Abrahamson
Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois

SIR – I agree with your dim view of the European Union as the most competitive "knowledge economy" in the world. The only way to catch up with America is to privatise European universities, and that is unlikely to happen. The best and the brightest students and teachers around the world may be deflected temporarily from America because of the perceived terrorist threat, but Europe will attract few of them and keep even fewer as long as bureaucrats rather than the marketplace manage the university system.

Ranko Bon
Motovun, Croatia

SIR – Having taught at universities in America and Britain, I can safely say that the tendency of students to "dawdle pointlessly" crosses borders. It occurs even when massive fees are paid or rigorous selection procedures applied. After all, it is sometimes through pointless dawdling that you actually learn something. Ask any academic.

Charles Lockwood
University College
London

A flood of evidence

SIR – The claim that Haiti's natural disasters are both a cause and consequence of the misery of the country's

poor is plausible and compelling ("Inundated", September 25th). But the idea that peasant farmers chop down trees allowing water to run off the hillsides taking the topsoil with it and thus causing floods does not reflect the facts. Studies show that forests do mitigate floods linked to small storms. For larger and more damaging events, such as tropical storm Jeanne, there is little evidence that forests offer real benefits. Whatever the land use the rainfall has to run somewhere.

In extreme hurricane conditions it is also not clear whether forests reduce erosion much. Landslips still occur on steep slopes, forested or not. On forested slopes there may be the additional problem of washed-away trees destroying bridges and blocking culverts, exacerbating flood damage. Reforestation is unlikely to reduce Haiti's problems with flooding, and repressive efforts to stop small farmers from collecting wood for fuel could make a bad situation worse.

Ian Calder
Centre for Land Use and Water Resources Research
University of Newcastle
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

David Kaimowitz
Centre for International Forestry Research
Bogor, Indonesia

Sun dial

SIR – Contrary to what Ricardo Cabeza alleges, I am proud to say that our government phone menu here at the National Weather Service has an option to speak to a meteorologist (Letters, October 2nd). We talk to several people a day at our forecasting office, gladly giving out information and occasional advice on whether that umbrella is really needed or not.

Diana Henderson
San Francisco