

SPACE MILESTONE

The launch of Skyroot Aerospace's Vikram-1 is a major milestone in India's space development. The launch has heralded India's entry into the global space economy, a futuristic proposition pegged at an enormous amount. It's a matter of pride for the people of J&K that it's our very own Dr Jatinder Singh who is in charge of the Indian space department at this historic moment. Vikram-1 is the first privately developed space craft in India and its success has opened a plethora of possibilities for business, science and economy. The Hyderabad based Skyroot, a private company headed by a former space scientist, has accomplished a lot in its first attempt. It has placed nine payloads in its targeted orbits. This fete is something that only highly advanced countries can think of doing. The data collected during this flight will be analysed to validate guidance and navigation systems, and to guide future refinements for commercial satellite missions.

POJK UNREST

The unrest is POJK has reached its peak as the authorities in Islamabad have turned a deaf ear to the hold held grievance of the people of the region. The entire POJK is treated as a step child, probably Pakistan known that legally it's an Indian territory. However, the residents have been suffering from the lack of development and interest in seeing people prosper and live a good life. Islamabad could manage the area till the advent on social media that enabled the people all over the world to see things in any corner of the globe in real time. When the people in POJK saw the realities of J&K where people embraced peace and normal life and all round development, they obviously felt cheated. The trouble began with people of the area realizing Pakistan was using them as pawn and was not genuinely interested in the well-being of people.

Recalibrating communication for the Global South

Chaitanya K Prasad

The Global South does not suffer from a shortage of stories. It suffers from a shortage of control over how those stories are framed, circulated and remembered. Its countries are home to most of the world's population, some of its youngest societies, fastest-growing markets, oldest knowledge systems and most inventive responses to scarcity, climate stress, digital exclusion and social inequality. Yet much of the world still encounters the Global South through a narrow lens: conflict, poverty, instability, aid, extraction or delayed development. This is not merely a problem of image. It is a problem of power.

Communication shapes which experiences become universal, which institutions are treated as credible and which countries are seen as sources of ideas rather than recipients of them. For decades, the Global South has participated in an international communication order whose principal platforms, standards, narratives and gatekeepers were located elsewhere. Its societies have been represented, interpreted and often simplified before being heard directly. That order is no longer adequate.

The Global South now needs a communication strategy built around centrality. It must move from reacting to global conversations to setting them. It must stop appearing only as a subject of development and begin speaking as an author of the future. For India, this is both an opportunity and a responsibility.

India's role cannot be confined to amplifying diplomatic messaging or promoting national achievements. It can help build a wider communication architecture through which the countries of the Global South exchange knowledge, circulate culture, shape policy language and develop direct relationships with one another.

At the heart of this effort should be the orange economy. The orange economy brings together culture, creativity, technology, intellectual property, design, media, entertainment, heritage, fashion, animation, gaming, publishing and digital content. It recognises that ideas and cultural expres-



sion are not decorative additions to economic life. They create employment, shape identity, influence aspiration and build international visibility.

India's recent public communication increasingly reflects this understanding. The country presents itself not only through diplomacy, infrastructure, trade and technology, but also through cinema, crafts, music, cuisine, design, digital storytelling, creative entrepreneurship and civilisational knowledge. This shift matters because communication is most effective when audiences do not experience it as a communication policy. They experience it as culture. SouthAsians & Diaspora

For too long, culture has been treated as soft power in the weakest sense of the term, something attractive but secondary. In reality, creative industries are central to how countries become visible and memorable. The nations that shape global imagination do so not only through military or economic influence, but through stories, images, language, design and platforms. The Global South already produces extraordinary cultural work. Its weakness lies in circulation. Creators struggle with translation, financing, copyright protection, discoverability and access to regional markets.

India can propose a network for creative exchange that goes beyond ceremonial festivals. It could support film and documentary co-productions, translation funds, digital archives, publishing partnerships, creator residencies, animation collaborations, gaming exchanges and common platforms for cultural content.

The aim should not be to produce propaganda or a uniform Global South identity. The South is too diverse for that. The aim should be to allow its societies to encounter one another without always passing through external filters. This requires direct communication networks. At present, news about one country of the South often reaches another through institutions based in Europe or North America. Research produced in Africa may become visible in Asia only after recognition by a Western university or journal. A policy innovation in Latin America may remain unknown in South Asia. Cultural products often become internationally valuable only after endorsement by global festivals, streaming platforms or award systems located elsewhere.

This indirect model keeps the Global South on the sidelines of its own story. India can help create a communication framework with four connected pillars: culture, knowledge, media and technology. The cultural pillar should focus on the orange economy. It should link filmmakers, writers, designers, musicians, game developers, publishers, museums, heritage institutions and digital creators across the South.

The knowledge pillar should connect universities, think tanks and research institutions. India's educational leadership can be especially important here. Scholarships and training programmes remain valuable, but they are not enough. The deeper need is for a Global South knowledge common: shared digital libraries, multilingual courses, collaborative research networks and accessible repositories of public-policy experience.

The media pillar should support direct reporting among countries of the South. Journalist exchanges, regional news partnerships and multilingual editorial networks can reduce dependence on second-hand interpretation. The technology pillar should strengthen translation, distribution and discoverability. Artificial intelligence can lower language barriers, but technology must serve cultural context rather than flatten it. India's greatest advantage is not that it has solved every communication challenge. It has not. Its advantage is that it contains many of the tensions the Global South must manage: scale and diversity, tradition and modernity, local languages and global platforms, public institutions and private creativity, democratic debate and strategic messaging. This gives India the ability to act as a convener rather than a lecturer. Its communication strategy for the Global South should therefore avoid paternalism. India should not claim to speak for a large and varied group of countries. It should build platforms on which those countries speak directly, equally and repeatedly. SocialSciences

Global South communication cannot become another exercise in official declarations. It must involve universities, creators, entrepreneurs, students, journalists, teachers, researchers and local communities. Governments can create the architecture, but they should not monopolise the voice. Much official communication across the Global South remains formal, defensive and overloaded with institutional language.

The Global South must also stop communicating through the language of catching up. Its societies are not moving towards a future already perfected elsewhere. They are producing different futures: affordable digital systems, frugal innovation, multilingual education, community-led climate solutions, public technology at scale and new creative markets.

These are not regional exceptions. They are global ideas. The Global South does not need a louder version of the old communication order. It needs a different one: more direct, multilingual, creative, networked and confident.

WHEN THE UNPRECEDENTED BECOMES ROUTINE

Rajyogi Brahma Kumar Nikunjji

It was not so long ago that scientists predicted climate change would make monsoons unpredictable; as a result, rain-fed food grain cultivation in South Asia would suffer significantly and total cereal production would decline. Unfortunately, that prediction is becoming true day by day, with many parts of India now battling heavy rains and flooding. What was once a warning has become a pattern. AtmosphericScience

In 2023, 2024 and 2025, the world witnessed some of the hottest years on record, each surpassing the previous one. There is no doubt that this crisis is unexpected, yet one cannot deny that it has arrived because of man's own deeds. The situation across the globe has become so alarming that one question comes to everyone's mind: "Is there nothing we can do against nature's fury?" Does this question really need an answer?

Despite the galloping scientific achievements mankind has witnessed, we have never been able to question the invincibility of Nature. While textbooks are filled with lessons on natural calamities, there is still no breakthrough in predicting or preventing them with certainty. In such a



scenario, the best bet for any country is to be prepared for the worst while hoping for the best. A recent scientific study has concluded that almost all of the summer sea ice in the Arctic Ocean is likely to disappear by the end of this century because of global warming caused by greenhouse gas emissions. In India, another study has predicted that by the middle of the century, sea levels will rise by 24.1 cm, causing coastal floods and more cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, while the average temperature in cities such as Delhi and Mumbai will increase by three to four degrees Celsius. That prediction no longer feels dis-

tant. Delhi has already recorded some of its heaviest monsoon rainfall in decades, while Mumbai's low-lying areas now flood with alarming regularity.

It has taken many scientists a long time to accept that the world's climate is changing because of human activity. The burgeoning population, increasing industrial activity, deforestation and the rampant exploitation of the earth's natural resources have altered our ecosystem irreversibly. The devastating consequences are now becoming apparent. However, despite all these developments, many experts continue to explain extreme weather as isolated local phenomena instead of recognising the larger picture. It is obvious that the Earth's climate is changing for the worse. Nature, which has sustained human civilisation for thousands of years by providing sunshine, food and water, is turning harsher. The world went agog when a country like the UAE, associated more with deserts, witnessed rare snow and hail on its northern mountain peaks a few years ago. Similarly,

the devastating tsunami, which killed lakhs of people, showed how powerless humans are before the forces of nature. The lesson has not faded with time. Dubai, the same desert emirate, was paralysed in 2024 when a year's worth of rain fell in a single day, turning highways into rivers. Closer home, the Wayanad landslides buried entire hillside settlements in Kerala, while glacial lake floods in Sikkim swept away a dam and homes with barely any warning. Each of these events was described as unprecedented. None of them should have been. These manifestations of nature's fury cannot be mere anomalies. They are increasingly becoming the result of the damage done to the environment by human beings. In other words, we are now paying the price for abusing nature. Yet we continue to ignore these warning signs in pursuit of economic growth. Instead of learning from our mistakes, we are trying to outsmart nature. AtmosphericScience

But no amount of technology or money can save us from nature's wrath. It is still not too late to adopt sustainable, nature-friendly practices. This requires a shift from acquisition and consumption to sharing and caring. These cyclonic rains are nature's warning bells. If we fail to change, even greater disasters may await us.

From population explosion to population decline

Govind Bhattacharjee

At Independence, India had only 360 million people, and the population was multiplying fast, with a total fertility rate (TFR) of about 6. Today, the population has swelled to 1.45 billion, but the average TFR is down to only 1.9, below the replacement level of 2.1. The TFR also shows wide regional variations: from 1.2 in Delhi and 1.3 in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal to 3.0 in Bihar, 2.9 in Meghalaya, 2.4 in UP, and 2.3 in Jharkhand, the only states with a TFR above the replacement level. In these states, too, fertility has been coming down, albeit slowly. With only 2.4 per cent of the world's landmass, India accounts for 18 per cent of its population. Only a few years back, states like Assam and UP were contemplating punitive measures against families with more than two children, and many states still have a two-child policy in force, including Telangana, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttarakhand. They penalise members of families with more than two children in some way, sometimes debar-ring them from contesting local elections and sometimes denying them govern-

ment benefits or employment. Now the clock is turning full circle-in May 2026, in Andhra Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu announced a payout of Rs 30,000 to couples who have a third child. Evidence from across the world suggests that such incentives barely work in encouraging couples to opt for more children.

According to most estimates, India's population will peak around 2050 at about 1.6 billion and then fall as fast as it grew, to only 1 billion by the end of this century. Given our labour force participation rate of about 43 per cent and our median age of 29, it means our labour force will continue to grow for another 30 years or so, after which the demographic dividend will taper away. Thus, there may not be enough time for India to become a rich country unless growth remains steady at 8 per cent for the next three decades, a near impossibility. Just as China, South Korea and Japan are now trying to arrest their fast-declining populations, which are causing them anxiety, India is also getting worried that it will become old before it can become rich.

The worries are visible among the southern states, which have the lowest TFRs. Kerala has a little less than a fifth of

its population covered under some form of pension against the national average of 12 per cent; it has now opened a "Department for Ageing". It is already closing schools and importing workers from outside. Other states are also catching up. Demographic theories teach that low fertility starts only when a country reaches a per capita income of around \$7,000 in purchasing power parity (PPP), and women become educated and join the labour force, when they have a decisive voice in the family and want to balance work with childbearing and child-rearing. India's PPP per capita is almost double this threshold, and the falling fertility may reflect a surge in girls' enrolment in school since the 1990s. But 90 per cent of Indian women get married and only 33 per cent work, yet the TFR has been falling. Gen Z clearly seems to prefer dogs over kids.

Parents today prefer quality over quantity-the proportion of children in fee-paying schools rose from 31.7 per cent in 2015 to 38.8 per cent in 2025, and even in poorer states like Bihar and UP, this trend is visible. Also, about 70 per cent of Indians live in nuclear families due to urbanisation and labour market

demands, which disincentivise larger family sizes. Further, Indian parents' obsession with a boy child also seems to be weakening, and many parents are now content with having only a girl. The Economist points out that parents' thinking is also reinforced by culture, which in turn is shaped by changes in technology and access to information through the deep penetration of smartphones in rural India. The combined impact is that "having fewer children has become aspirational". Contraction in population is now beyond any dispute; the only question is how to manage it. FamilyLaw

The declining TFR is already causing social, economic and political strains. Southern states have always relied on labour from the northern and eastern states like Assam, UP, Odisha and Bihar, traditionally in hotels and restaurants. Now migrants are increasingly providing workers for factories, construction, caregiving, nursing, warehousing and logistics, food delivery, e-commerce, domestic work and security jobs. Southern states cannot possibly survive without migrants, but higher migration has the potential to create resentment among the local population; there are already com-

plaints in some states about the influx of outsiders who cannot speak the local language, as seen in demands in Karnataka for greater use of Kannada in workplaces and on public signage. Rapid population growth in cities such as Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi and Coimbatore is also creating pressure on urban infrastructure, affecting the quality of public service delivery. Ten per cent of Kerala's population are migrants, and there are growing demands for low-cost housing and primary healthcare, which has forced the Kerala government to launch a special health insurance scheme for migrants. Bengaluru has grown from about 6 million people in 2001 to around 15 million today, and the strain on urban infrastructure is visible in water scarcity, interminable traffic congestion, rising rents, and increased pressure on sewage and public transport systems. It is the same tale with other southern cities.

The strains are also visible in public finance: the last two Finance Commissions have used the 2011 population instead of the 1971 population as one of the parameters for determining the states' share, and the southern states have been the losers, while the Hindi-belt states

have gained on this account. This has caused significant resentment among the southern states, which feel they have been penalised for controlling their populations.

Now the impending exercise of delimitation has turned into one of the most politically sensitive issues, with the southern states suspecting that they would be penalised for implementing national family-planning goals, while the northern states argue that democracy requires equal representation. Both have valid logic: the current distribution of Lok Sabha seats is still largely based on the 1971 Census, even though India's population has more than doubled since then. The five southern states, with about 20 per cent of the population today, account for 24 per cent of Lok Sabha seats while contributing more than a third of the country's GDP and a disproportionately large share of its tax revenues.

A population-based delimitation would inevitably increase the representation of the faster-growing Hindi-speaking states while reducing the South's share of seats, giving it a much-diminished voice and influence in central policymaking.