

NEPAL DISASTER

The catastrophic flash flood on the Nepal-Tibet border holds a lesson for all the Himalayan countries. The Himalaya are young and fragile and susceptible to massive landslides that can block water and a glacier and release it as flash floods with slightest changes in pressure or temperature brining down disasters for humans and the country's infrastructure. Nepal is still trying to fathom the human and material losses incurred in the devastation it is yet to come to terms with. Villages have been swept away by debris laden flood waters, hydro power stations completely annihilated and with people still missing makes it a big Himalayan Tragedy. The Himalayan nations have to think about a joint effort to remain alert on such a disaster occurring anywhere and the countries like India and China which have powerful satellites to devise joint mechanisms to monitor the situation and share information quickly with the riparian country, which could get struck by devastation. This will also require cool thinking on behalf of the leaders of all these countries and improved relations among them.

MISSING DOCTORS

Border areas of Jammu and Kashmir had faced neglect for too long. Be it infrastructure, job creation of even basis amenities like medical centers, the areas on International border and the Line of Control lacked facilities, making lives of locals difficult. Additionally, they also bore the brunt of the hostilities between India and Pakistan. Finally the policy of keeping borders backwards so that these remain inaccessible to the enemy during war has been reversed. A massive programme has been launched to lay roads and given houses to the locals. Now to top it a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs has recommended expediting regular recruitment of doctors and specialists in Jammu and Kashmir, while calling for expansion of post-graduate medical education and specialist training to improve healthcare delivery in remote, border and difficult areas. We do hope this will be implemented soon.

Chaitanya K Prasad

Power has traditionally been understood in fairly straightforward terms, economic strength, military capability, technological advancement and political influence. But in today's interconnected world, there is another form of power that is becoming equally important: the ability of a country to attract, inspire and influence without coercion. That is the power of soft power.

India has always possessed it. What is changing now is the scale of the opportunity before us. In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi identified soft power as one of the seven Saptadharas that can take India towards greater national strength, alongside manufacturing, agriculture and food processing, technology and innovation, infrastructure, defence, and the green and blue economy. The inclusion of soft power in this framework is significant because it places culture, creativity and global influence within the larger developmental vision of Viksit Bharat.

For India, soft power is not something that needs to be artificially created. It already exists in extraordinary depth. Yoga is today practised

across continents. Ayurveda has found growing international interest. Indian cinema and music travel far beyond the country's borders. Indian food has become part of everyday life in cities across the world. Our spiritual traditions, festivals, textiles, classical arts, literature and philosophies have shaped perceptions of India for generations. But possessing cultural richness and converting it into sustained global influence are two different things. That is where India's next opportunity lies.

There is a broader understanding of soft power beyond the traditional ideas of heritage and culture. It connects yoga, Ayurveda and tourism with newer sectors such as VFX, animation, gaming and the creative economy. It also identifies wildlife, national parks, major sporting events and the rapidly growing concert economy as areas through which India can attract the world and showcase its capabilities. This is an important shift. Soft power today is no longer only about how much of a country's past the world admires. It is also about how relevant that country feels in the present.

India has one of the oldest civilisations in the world, but it also has one of the youngest populations. Our global identity, therefore, cannot rest

only on ancient temples, classical traditions or historical achievements. It must also include contemporary India, its filmmakers, designers, musicians, gamers, animators, athletes, entrepreneurs and digital creators. The real power lies in bringing both together. Indiatravel guide

India should be able to speak to the world through yoga and artificial intelligence, Ayurveda and animation, classical music and gaming, ancient knowledge systems and cutting-edge digital creativity. These are not contradictions. In fact, they are what make India distinctive. The creative economy is particularly important in this context. Countries increasingly shape global perceptions through the stories they tell. Cinema, television, music, gaming and digital content reach people in ways that formal diplomacy often cannot. They enter homes, influence taste, create familiarity and build emotional connections.

A person may know very little about the politics or foreign policy of a country and yet feel deeply connected to it because of its films, food, music or culture. That emotional familiarity matters. When people admire a country's culture, they become curious about the country itself. Curiosity can lead to tourism, education, business

engagement and deeper people-to-people ties. In that sense, soft power is not separate from economic development; it can actively contribute to it.

Tourism is perhaps one of the clearest examples. India has extraordinary geographical and cultural diversity, from the Himalayas and the deserts of Rajasthan to wildlife reserves, coastal regions, heritage cities, spiritual centres and the North-East. Yet the potential of these assets as instruments of global influence remains far greater than what we currently realise.

The Prime Minister specifically highlighted wildlife, national parks and tourism as areas through which India can draw global visitors. A tourist who visits India does much more than spend money here. They experience the country personally. They interact with people, encounter its culture and carry those experiences back with them. In that sense, every positive visitor experience becomes a form of informal diplomacy.

International sporting events and the concert economy are becoming the new areas of opportunity. Hosting major global events does not simply generate revenue. It places a country at the centre of global attention. It showcases infrastructure, cities, culture and organizational ca-

pability. It also creates memories associated with a country that can last far beyond the event itself. India's improving international sporting presence and its ambitions around major sporting events therefore have a larger significance as well. There is also an economic argument for taking soft power more seriously. Culture today is an industry. Indiatravel guide

Films generate tourism. Music creates events and digital revenue. Gaming creates valuable intellectual property. Wellness traditions create global markets. Cuisine supports food exports and restaurant businesses. Heritage sustains tourism economies. Sporting events create opportunities across hospitality, transport, advertising and broadcasting. Soft power can therefore create a chain of value: cultural visibility creates curiosity; curiosity creates engagement; engagement creates trust; and trust can eventually create economic and strategic opportunities. But for India to fully realise this potential, one important shift is necessary. We have to move from simply being proud of our culture to becoming better at presenting it to the world. That means investing in creators, institutions and platforms. It means supporting animation, films, gaming, music and

design at international standards. It means better preservation and presentation of heritage. It means making tourism seamless, safe and globally competitive. It means strengthening translation so that Indian literature and ideas can travel across languages. It means helping regional stories find global audiences rather than reducing India to a few familiar cultural symbols.

India's greatest strength here may actually be its diversity. There is no single Indian story. There are thousands of them. Every region offers its own food, music, language, landscape, literature, craft, history and cultural tradition. If these are given global platforms, India does not merely have one source of soft power; it has an almost limitless reservoir of them.

There is, however, one condition. Soft power works only when it is credible. A country cannot build long-term influence through projection alone. What the world sees must ultimately connect with what the country is. The Prime Minister himself linked India's growing international respect with the country's political stability, vibrant democracy, judicial system and constitutional framework. Reputation is strongest when it is backed by reality.

Himalayan tragedy: A disaster in Nepal, a warning for India

Satyendra Singh

A catastrophic flash flood hit Nepal's Himalayan border area on August 26, killing people and causing massive destruction. Houses have been inundated; roads and bridges have been destroyed or washed away, and infrastructure like electricity have been affected. Rescue efforts are ongoing in inaccessible locations; meanwhile, it is still unclear how much damage the mega disaster has caused. However, this is not just Nepal's problem, but India's, especially Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh's. The reason is obvious: rivers carrying Himalayan waters do not recognise political boundaries.

So far, the exact reason for the flash flood is being investigated. According to initial findings, an ice-rock or glacial avalanche could have occurred, possibly along with a temporary river blockade and sudden releasing of huge amount of water, rock, and sediments. An earthquake is also one of the reasons. The idea of glacial lake outburst has so far not got enough evidence.

What should be remembered in general is that flash flood in the Himalayas is the ultimate result of a chain of events starting with glacier or slope instability, followed by river blockade and huge release of water, rocks, and sediments. The Himalayas are gradually turning into the sources of cascading disasters.

The present flooding started from the upper parts of Bhotekoshi/Lhende river system at the border between Tibet and Nepal. The flood wave travelled from the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli river systems to the Narayani and further down the river as the Gandak in India. This explains why there has been fear for the downstream areas of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

When the Rivers of Nepal Flow into India To appreciate India's vulnerability, one needs to move away from the political map and consider the river-basin map. While politically Nepal and India are two separate countries, hydrologically they are one system. Himalayan water feeds the irriga-

tion, domestic and ecological needs as well as livelihoods of millions, but if anything goes wrong in the upper basins, these very rivers can be transformed into destructive rivers.

Sarda, Ghaghra, Rapti, Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla and Kosi are some of the rivers contributing to floods in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar that originate in or travel through Nepal. India and Nepal already have bilateral agreements concerning flood forecasting and water management. The present disaster is a good opportunity for strengthening them.

Gandak is particularly relevant to the present situation. Narayani River becomes Gandak when it enters India and travels through Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and finally meets the Ganges River. Bihar is also vulnerable to other Himalayan rivers such as Kosi, Bagmati, Burhi Gandak and Ghaghra.

An unexpected outburst after an avalanche, landslide, or flooding of a river due to the formation of a dam would give very little warning time. Hence, the early warning system should not only alert about the crossing of river levels by a river. It should also warn about which villages can be flooded, what infrastructure would be affected and where the search and rescue teams and aid materials must be deployed. India requires transitioning from hazard prediction to impact prediction.

The hazard environment in the Himalayas is changing. Changes in temperature and climatic conditions have influenced rainfall patterns and the behaviour of glaciers and slopes, while roadways, tunnels, hydropower plants, tourist destinations, and development in general are increasing in fragile regions. Satellite imagery, remote sensing, automatic devices, drones and artificial intelligence technology can help a lot in monitoring. But technology alone is not enough for preparedness. A warning displayed on a government dashboard is not very useful if it does not reach those affected by it. Villagers, farmers, schoolteachers and families have to know what it means and what

needs to be done to protect themselves. Equally important is the local knowledge about which embankments will collapse first, which roads will become impassible and how floodwaters will inundate their villages. Thus, the goal should be to define the affected population, identify critical infrastructure, evacuate routes and places, as well as position trained local teams and relief forces beforehand.

Lessons from Uttarakhand

The recent catastrophe in Nepal makes us recall a lesson that India had been taught earlier. The disaster in Uttarakhand clearly showed the interaction of heavy rains, floods, landslides, geological instability, settlements, infrastructure and development. The basic lesson learned was obvious: natural hazard turns into disaster due to the vulnerability of society. Indiabusiness news

The lessons teach us about zoning, restrictions on building in risky zones, Disaster Impact Assessment along with Environmental Impact Assessment, slope stabilization, protection of ecosystems, better warning systems and community preparedness. But still: do we learn from disasters or merely document them?

The solution does not lie in halting development. Connectivity, growth and security depend on roads, tunnels, hydropower and tourism infrastructure. The question is where and how such development happens. Development in the mountains cannot happen in the same way as development on more stable terrains. Geomorphological and environmental assessment is crucial for any hydropower or tunnel project. Consequently, Disaster Impact Assessment must become a necessary element of infrastructure development in fragile Himalayan regions.

Nature needs to play a role in disaster-risk reduction as well. Forests, wetlands, stable slopes and healthy water catchments protect from erosion, runoff and siltation. Thus, their conservation and restoration should become complementary to engineering solutions.

Transboundary Himalayan Resilience

Agenda

The Nepal tragedy proves one thing for certain: disaster resilience in the Himalayas must be transboundary in nature. India and Nepal must work together to create a Himalayan transboundary disaster risk management framework taking into account their shared hydrological basins. Satellite imagery, glacier and glacial lake assessment, avalanches and landslides monitoring, earthquake data, precipitation forecasts and river level monitoring should all be integrated into early warning and impact forecasting system.

The response has to be proactive, not reactive. There should be no need for downstream governments to react only after the disaster crosses the international border, but the warning must come before the flood does.

We have to shift our approach from relief to risk reduction, from hazard assessment to impact prediction, from project-level initiatives to regional water basin planning, and from national activities to transboundary cooperation.

Bihar and Uttar Pradesh should take note of this particular alarm. The lives of people downstream will rely heavily on choices being made thousands of kilometres away, perhaps even outside of India. The Himalayas are not only a natural dividing line between countries; they are a single, interconnected ecosystem.

While we cannot control our geography, we can definitely change the way we respond to whatever our geography may present to us. The real choice is not development versus disaster-risk reduction. It is risk-blind development versus risk-informed development. This was the message that Uttarakhand delivered to us, and Nepal's misfortune serves to reaffirm it. In case the Himalaya shakes, the plains must be ready. If we want to secure people, infrastructure, agriculture, energy systems and ecosystems of the Himalaya-Ganga basin, one rule must reign supreme: The river basin, not the political boundary, should be the basic unit of disaster-risk management.

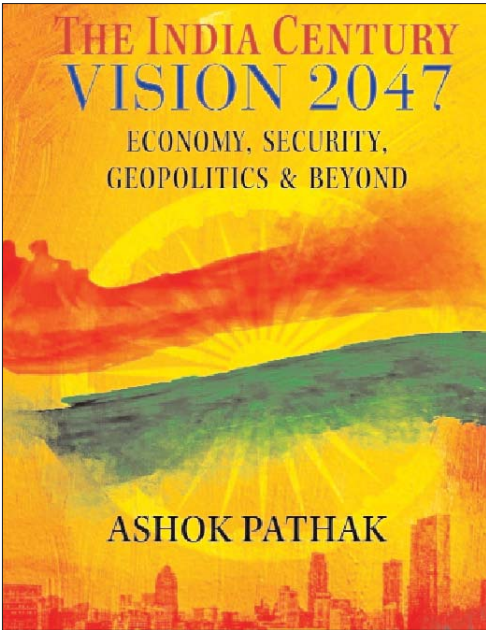
INDIA: AIMING TO BE A MULTI-TRILLION ECONOMY

Anil Bhat

This book has been sponsored by Bharat Global Industries Forum (BGIF), a premier national think-and-action platform uniting India's top corporations, policymakers, and global investors to support the concept and accomplishment of Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and helping this nation to grow into a manufacturing hub with a \$30 trillion economy.

The central theme of the book aims at Vision 2047, going beyond headline numbers of GDP (\$30 trillion) and GDP per capita (\$18000/-) to the overall well-being of ordinary citizens. NITI Ayog's ambitions of creating an India of 2047 where the citizens are intimately connected to governance, assured best of education, health care, social services and public infrastructure are discussed against the backdrop of past inertia and baggage of organisational slack.

He describes the unsatisfactory state of private sector investment in R&D and the inefficiencies of SMEs. At the same time, some early silver linings are also highlighted - like the high percentage of indigenous defense systems, India's achievements in space, quantum computing and semiconductors. The unique feature of author's style is his dependence on hard data



without diluting the readability for an ordinary student of the subject.

In a broader sense linking 'Viksit Bharat 2047 Vision' to the three major pillars- economy, national security and geopolitics makes the road to 2047 much more distinct and meaningful. Students of macro and political economy will find the chapter on economy very lucid and informative, as it links the current milieu with the an-

cient - Kautilya's Arthashastra; and western economic philosophy of Adam Smith.

The book highlights the Indian philosophy of oneness of humanity. Ekatomavad, or Integral Humanism, is a socio-economic and political philosophy propounded by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya in 1964. It presents an integrated approach to human existence, balancing individual needs with societal welfare.

The author has emphasised that national security should not be looked at only in terms of military strength, but holistically and that defense expenditure should be viewed as economic investment. The issues of indigenisation of defense production have been very lucidly explained with the help of case study on HF 24 and LCA Tejas and the overall strength of Indian Air Force.

On geopolitics the book has exposed to the global challenges arising out of national ambitions based on power, assumed roles in global affairs and theology driven undercurrents that trigger conflicts. India's strength, challenges, compulsions and their impact on achieving the vision 2047 have been neatly explained. The author has done well to bring out the role of soft power in achieving geopolitical goals. Since the Bharatiya Janata Party came

to power under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, India has witnessed a profound shift toward mainstreaming Hindu civilizational identity and state-backed cultural nationalism. This movement views its current trajectory as a long-overdue decolonization and public reclamation of indigenous heritage, contrasting sharply with decades of post-independence "secular" governance. This post-2014 era in India is at last emerging as a vital correction to centuries of cultural and political marginalization, during which foreign Islamic rulers and British colonial powers suppressed native Hindu identity, history, and traditions. This political shift in 2014 of democratic reassertion of India's indigenous civilizational ethos was waiting to happen. Indiabusiness news

Massive development of roads, railways, and ports; growth in manufacturing through production incentives; expansion of the tech and renewable energy sectors and strong domestic consumption of the rising middle class are indications of the strong possibility of the aims stated. The author served in the Corps of Signals and retired in 2006 as Deputy Director General of Army Signals Intelligence.

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Soft power: India's opportunity to shape the global imagination