

Power and IMPENDING GLORY

Only bold strategic thinking and slaying of several sacred cows can lead to the realisation of the Great Indian Dream

— By **KISHORE MAHBUBANI**

The American dream is over. The Indian dream is arriving. Am I exaggerating? Of course, I am. America will remain far more prosperous than India for decades to come (although many now believe that the Indian Gross National Product (GNP) will surpass the American GNP before 2050).

Yet dreams are not about past or present realities. They are about hopes and aspirations for the future. And a big shift in world history has occurred with so few taking note of its implications. Many young Americans no longer believe that they will experience the same improvement in living standards that their parents did. By contrast, many young

Indians believe that they will do much better than their parents.

One of America's greatest strengths was that it was the most optimistic nation on earth. For decades the Americans believed that even the sky was not the limit. This is how they managed to walk on the moon. Gradually this optimism is being sapped away. Don't get me wrong. The Boston Brahmins and the Californian creative class will continue to enjoy the best living standards. They will not suffer. But the American dream was always about how anyone could make it in America. The bottom of the pyramid shared the same dreams.

But the bottom is falling out of the bottom of America. There is real despair in Detroit and Flint, Michigan. By contrast India has been gradually reducing poverty at the bottom. The

percentage of population living on less than a dollar a day has progressively decreased from 42 per cent in 1981 to 24 per cent in 2005.

In short, there is real hope for India. The country can make it and show the way. But to achieve this, India must also be prepared to make bold decisions to shake off some of the millstones around its neck. Amazingly enough, there are some simple solutions readily available for India to grasp.

Take the case of the biggest millstone around India's neck since Independence: Pakistan. There is one simple step India can take: Indian discourse should stop using the word "Pakistan". Instead it should use either "Pakistani Government" or Pakistani People".

Virtually all of the problems that India has suffered have come from the "Pakistani

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BANDEEP SINGH



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Government". By contrast, the "Pakistani People" now want better relations with the Indian people because they want to replicate the Indian dream in Pakistan. And they know they can do that. The Pakistani people and Indian people are the same. There is no reason for any hate to continue.

I can say this with great personal conviction because my childhood was soaked with hate of Pakistan. My Hindu Sindhi parents had a close shave leaving Pakistan after Partition took place in 1947. My father once told me a horrifying story. A young Hindu relative was once

killed in a Hindu-Muslim riot. But when the body was brought to the relative's parents, they denied that that body was their son's for fear of even greater retribution. Yes, there was real hate at one time.

Today, that hate is gone. Even the Pakistani army has begun to realise that India is no longer Pakistan's biggest threat. The jihadis are the main threat. And the Pakistani elite is aware that the expectations of their population have changed. Indeed, in New York or in Davos, when the Indians and Pakistanis meet, there is virtually no cultural distance. They socialise as

one people, providing a live real indicator of how things can change between India and Pakistan.

Still, it will take awesome political courage for any Indian leader to shift course on policy towards the Pakistani people. Both Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi have displayed such courage recently. Now the Indian people have to show similar courage by supporting them strongly. And when the Pakistani millstone is finally taken off India's neck, our country will walk with a real spring in its step.

Equally importantly, a new great game of geo-politics is emerging. Goldman Sachs is right in predicting that the three largest economies in the world in 2050 will be China, India and America (and in that order). Hence,

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the relations between the three will determine the geo-political dynamics of the world.

There is a very simple almost mathematical equation that will determine which of the three powers will have a strategic advantage in this great game: the one power that has better relations with the other two will have a natural leverage. Right now America has better relations with China and India than China and India have with each other. By leaning in favour of one or another, America can gain strategic leverage.

Both China and India can also gain similar strategic leverage by significantly improving relations with each other. In some ways, relations have never been better. Over the past decade, China and India have set goals of achieving \$10 billion, then \$20 billion, and then \$30 billion bilateral trade by 2010. Yet by 2008, trade has exceeded \$50 billion. In many global challenges, from climate change to the

Doha Round, from jihadi terrorism to Third World solidarity, China and India have common interests and positions.

Yet, despite all this, suspicions are rising on bilateral issues: from border disputes to nuclear proliferation, from Myanmar to maritime expansion. And, of course, China's relations with Pakistan have been a constant challenge. Hence, here too the removal of the Pakistan millstone will liberate Sino-Indian relations and enable both to focus on the larger geo-political gains that come from global cooperation rather than bilateral zero-sum games.

There is one fundamental common interest both China and India share. From the year 1 to 1820, they provided the world's two largest economies. It took a massive amount of under-performance for both to fall badly behind the West and to be brutally exploited. Only a hundred years ago, 300 million Indians were ruled by just 100,000 Englishmen. And China too suffered from humiliating Western territorial settlements.

Now both China and India have an extraordinary opportunity to shake off two hundred years of incompetent performance to become the world's two greatest powers. Both can help to lift each other up. Or both can pull each

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other down. The strategic choice is clear.

It is also clear that all of Asia wants China and India to succeed. As the former Singapore prime minister, Goh Chok Tong, once said, India and China can provide two powerful jet engines to lift their societies and the rest of Asia as we soar into the 21st century. Indeed, there has never been a better historical opportunity for all of Asia than the moment we are experiencing now.

This is why the moment has come for the Indian establishment to engage in deep reflection on India's future in the next 100 years. Such moments of historical opportunity as we are experiencing now never come easily. A favourable correlation of forces has opened a new window of opportunity for India. And if India can engage in new and bold strategic thinking and slay several sacred cows along the way, the Indian dream may finally be realised.

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Poised at a historic cusp, India could in the next two decades either attain great power status or become a giant non-entity.”

ARUN PRAKASH
former chief of
the naval staff



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