



The Asian Lenses Forum  
AN NIIT UNIVERSITY INITIATIVE

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THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL  
TALF CONFERENCE





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## THE 2<sup>ND</sup> ASIAN LENSES FORUM (TALF) DELIBERATES ON THE 'EMERGENCE OF INDIA AS A GLOBAL SOFT POWER'

*Witnesses thought-provoking discussions from intellectuals on the growing significance of India and Asian countries in today's global scenario*

*First-of-its-kind initiative by NIIT University to sensitize young generation to Asian heritage, culture, history and values, TALF gains wider acceptance and following*

Established with a vision to bring about innovation in higher education and learning in emerging areas of the knowledge society, the not-for-profit NIIT University (NU) presented **The 2nd Annual Asian Lenses Forum (TALF)** conference in the capital. With an aim to focus on India's presence in the world scenario as a rising soft power, this year's TALF Conference deliberated on the '**Emergence of India as a Global Soft Power**'.

A unique initiative by NIIT University, The Asian Lenses Forum (TALF) is an outward looking coalition of committed thought leaders, opinion makers and informed youth. TALF aims to prepare the young Asian generations to find their place in this rapidly changing global environment by providing them with a deeper understanding of what it means to be Asian. As a platform it seeks to generate relevant knowledge and encourage multiple dialogues, engaging stakeholders across generations and nationalities.

The prominent speakers this year who highlighted various aspects of India as a 'soft power' were diplomat and author **Pavan Varma**; **Ashok Khosla** who has written extensively on Sustainable Development; renowned Bharatanatyam dancer and author **Leela Samson**; and award-winning journalist & author of an incisive book on China - 'Smoke & Mirrors', **Pallavi Aiyar**. The conversations were

anchored by **Jean-Pierre Lehmann**, Professor Emeritus at IMD Lausanne, visiting Professor at NIIT University (NU) and an exceptional Asianist who has invested a majority of his scholarly pursuits in understanding Asia and globalization. Also present were **Rajendra Pawar**, Founder, NIIT University; members of the NU Board including **Harpal Singh**, Chairman Emeritus, Fortis and **Rajendra Pandey**, President, NIIT University.

The unique format of the event made the session truly engaging and intense. It showcased a new-age classroom set-up wherein the key speakers were seated on a rotating stage in the middle of the hall, with concentric circles of seating around it. This enabled eye contact between everyone in the hall, creating an opportunity to interact closely with panelists, thus stimulating a free-flowing exchange of ideas. The presentations were informal, crisp and dynamic, inviting discussion and debate on India as an emerging 'soft power.' Students from NIIT University campus in Neemrana, connected real-time to the conference through state-of-the-art technology enabled interface and asked incisive questions to the panelists.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr **Rajendra Pawar**, Chairman, NIIT Ltd & Founder, NIIT University said, "*The old world order is giving in to the new world order and the emergence of India and Asia is being*



*recognized across the globe. It's not our military prowess that is being acknowledged, but the power we wield from an understanding of our rich heritage. The Asian Lenses Forum (TALF) is an attempt to enable today's youth to appreciate and understand their legacy and draw inspiration from it."*

*"Hence for India to assert its dominance as a global soft power it is important for our youth to comprehend and recognize the legacy that nurtures this power", added Mr Pawar.*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries many of the Asian countries were colonized or otherwise subjugated by the West. The Asian mosaic of civilization was severely damaged, if not completely overwhelmed by Western imperialism. This dominance extended to every arena of economic, social and cultural life in a way that the Asian view of the world, and indeed of itself, got distorted by what one may call the Western Lens. Consequently, it would not be an overstatement to suggest that much of what Asians know of themselves is from the prism of western writers, historians and thinkers.

However, since the turn of this century, one is witnessing the emergence of a new global reality: The Resurgence of Asia. Soft power in this context is an extension of a nation's image abroad, but also a reflection of a nation's domestic image and vision. What do Indians, especially young Indians, think it means to be Indian? How can the sought-after global soft power impact and influence domestic policies and national psychology? The two questions, what kind of role India aspires to globally and what kind of society does it aspire to nationally, are interlinked. What are the values that should define India's national and global identity? These questions lead yet again to the issue of the Asian Lens. India has to

take leadership in ensuring that today, the world looks at the continent through new, Asian Lenses and understands the region through Asian eyes.

According to NIIT University Visiting Professor, Dr Jean-Pierre Lehmann, *"The narrative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be written in Asia. An initiative such as TALF (The Asian Lenses Forum) is the need of the hour, for it is an entity that studies Asia through Asian eyes."* Mr. Harpal Singh, Board Member, NIIT University & Chairman Emeritus, Fortis further added, *"We are confident that TALF will go a long way in helping youth reclaim pride in their heritage and thus help establish their identity in the evolving global economy."*

NU realizes the need and importance of developing new and potentially superior understanding rather than creating a new body of knowledge that is parochial, self-centered and narrow. Asians and citizens from other geographies must, in the future, have the opportunity to "Know" about Asians from new and alternative lenses, as they reflect and think about what kind of future they would like to build for themselves and for the global community. TALF aims to work towards this through actionable steps and projects and aims to create out of every Asian youngster today, a responsible global citizen with a confident sense of his own identity.

The 1<sup>st</sup> TALF Conference held in 2014 witnessed thought-provoking presentations from award-winning journalist and author Pallavi Aiyar; Member of the Planning Commission, former India Chairman of Boston Consulting Group and author Arun Maira and Deepak Nayyar, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi.







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IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND OURSELVES NOT ONLY FROM THE EYES OF OTHERS, BUT ALSO FROM OUR OWN EYES. BEAUTY LIES IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT TODAY'S YOUNG LEARNERS VIEW PHENOMENA THROUGH SINGULAR OR MULTIPLE LENSES AND CREATE COMMON, MORE HOLISTIC VIEWS ABOUT REALITY. THEY NEED TO DEVELOP THE ABILITY TO SEE LIFE FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.

”

**HARPAL SINGH**

Board Member, NIIT University  
& Chairman Emeritus, Fortis







“

WHEN IT COMES TO  
HARD POWER—MILITARY POWER—  
CHINA BESTS INDIA.  
BUT WHEN IT COMES TO SOFT POWER,  
THE REVERSE IS OFTEN TRUE.  
NOT JUST IN GLOBAL TERMS  
BUT ALSO BILATERALLY.  
INDIA EXERTS CONSIDERABLE  
INFLUENCE ON CHINA.

”

**PALLAVI AIYAR**

Award-winning Journalist  
and Author



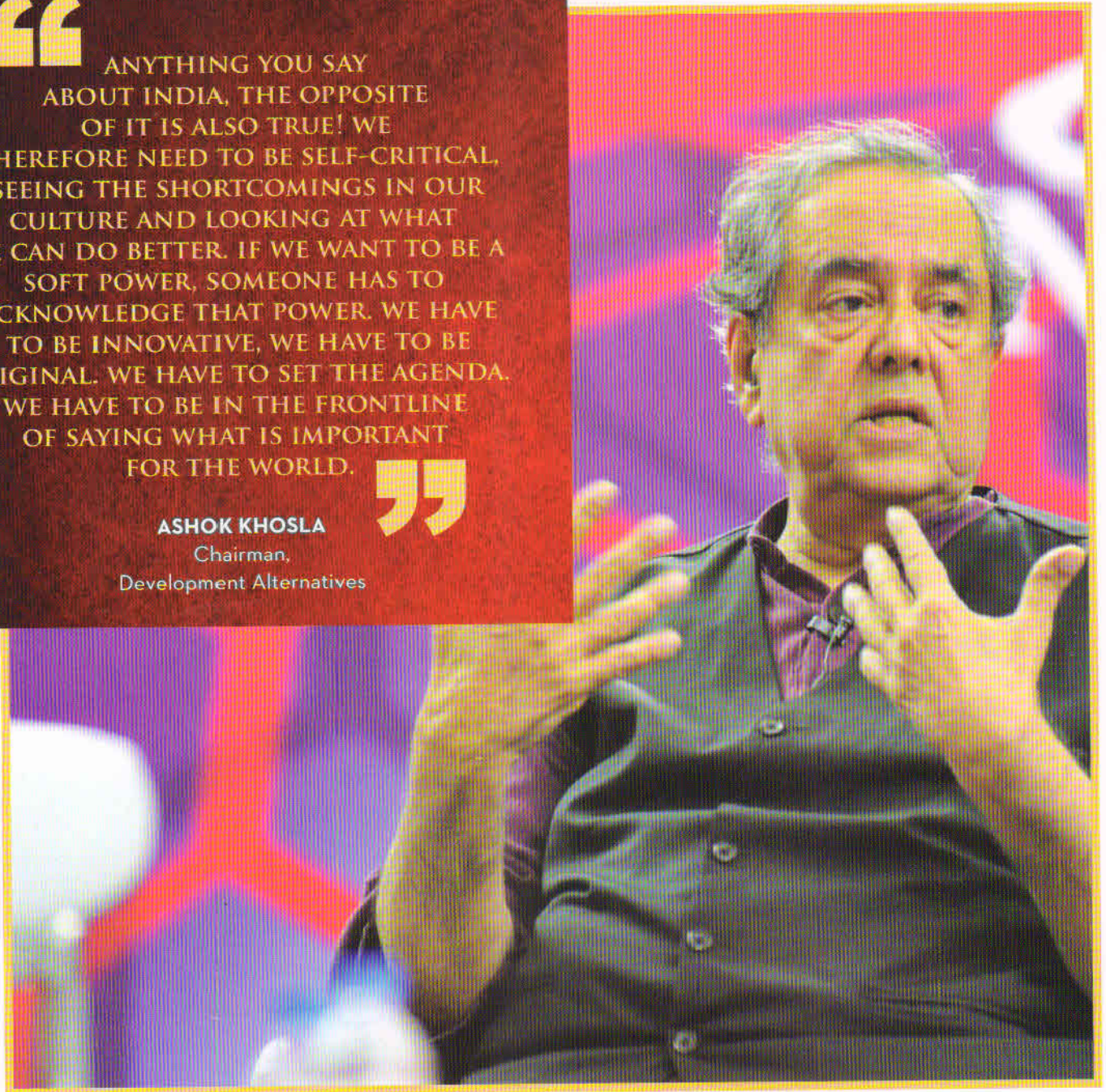
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ANYTHING YOU SAY ABOUT INDIA, THE OPPOSITE OF IT IS ALSO TRUE! WE THEREFORE NEED TO BE SELF-CRITICAL, SEEING THE SHORTCOMINGS IN OUR CULTURE AND LOOKING AT WHAT WE CAN DO BETTER. IF WE WANT TO BE A SOFT POWER, SOMEONE HAS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT POWER. WE HAVE TO BE INNOVATIVE, WE HAVE TO BE ORIGINAL. WE HAVE TO SET THE AGENDA. WE HAVE TO BE IN THE FRONTLINE OF SAYING WHAT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE WORLD.

”

**ASHOK KHOSLA**

Chairman,  
Development Alternatives







“

INDIA CANNOT BECOME  
A DERIVATIVE POWER, WITH  
PEOPLE WHO ARE POLISHED  
PHOTOCOPIES OF OTHERS!  
THERE IS A GREAT FEAR  
ESPECIALLY AMONG THE EDUCATED  
IN THE COUNTRY, THAT THERE  
IS A DIMINISHING SENSE OF  
AUTHENTICITY AND A MUCH  
GREATER SENSE OF THE  
DERIVATIVE.

”

**PAVAN VARMA**

Member Rajya Sabha,  
Former Diplomat and Author



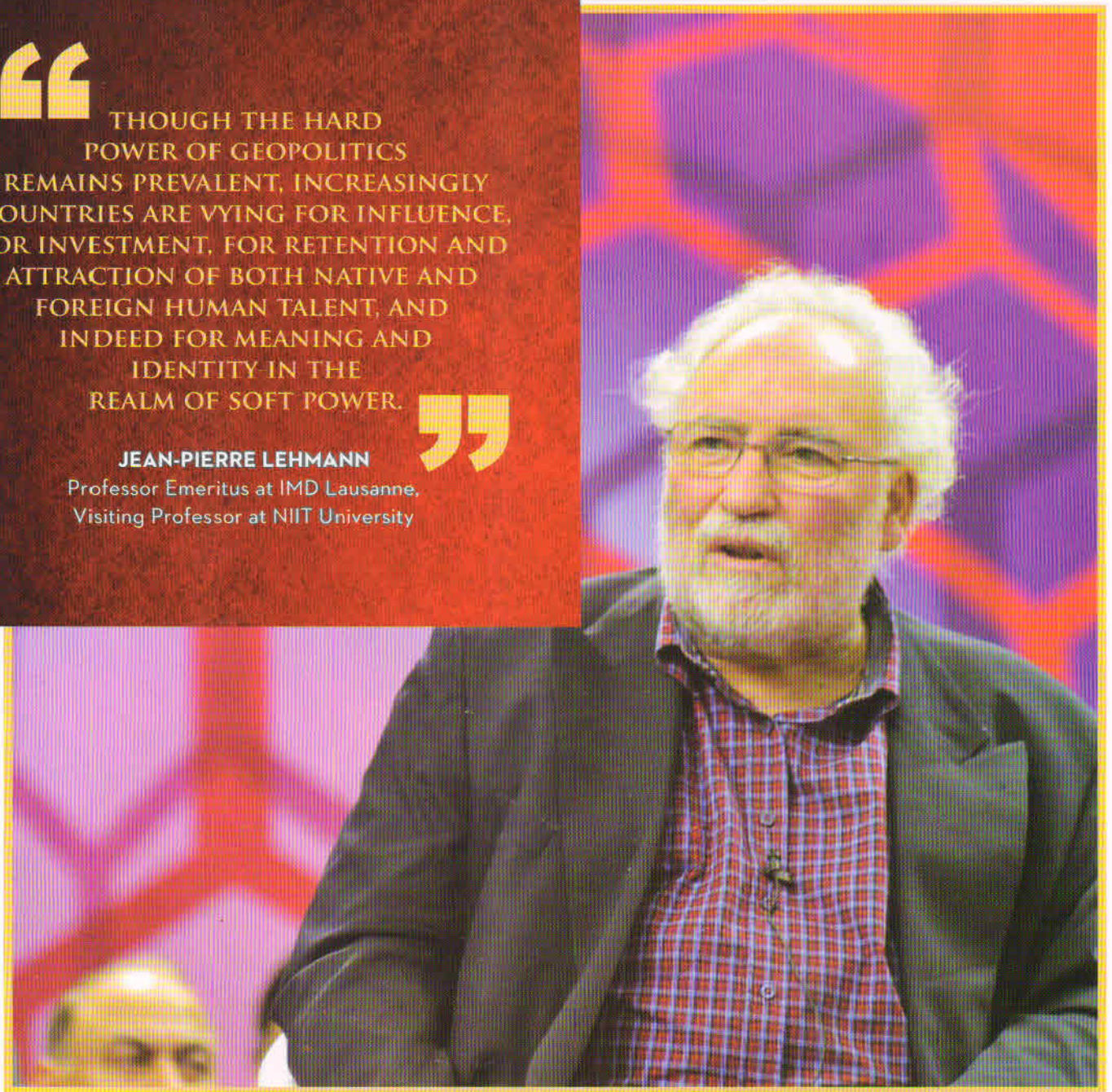
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THOUGH THE HARD  
POWER OF GEOPOLITICS  
REMAINS PREVALENT, INCREASINGLY  
COUNTRIES ARE VYING FOR INFLUENCE,  
FOR INVESTMENT, FOR RETENTION AND  
ATTRACTION OF BOTH NATIVE AND  
FOREIGN HUMAN TALENT, AND  
INDEED FOR MEANING AND  
IDENTITY IN THE  
REALM OF SOFT POWER.

”

**JEAN-PIERRE LEHMANN**

Professor Emeritus at IMD Lausanne,  
Visiting Professor at NIIT University







“

OUR ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS WITH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE HAS MADE WAVES. BOLLYWOOD IS NOT THE ONLY THING MAKING ITS WAY INTO THEATRES ACROSS THE GLOBE. CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE, BOOKS, ARTWORKS AND HERBAL COSMETICS, WHICH ARE REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR COLLECTIVE HISTORY AND HERITAGE, HAVE BECOME POPULAR. INDIA BOASTS MULTILINGUAL, MULTICULTURAL, MULTI-RELIGIOUS AND MULTI-POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES WHICH GIVE US STRENGTH AND VIGOUR. THERE'S SO MUCH GOING FOR INDIA AS A LEADING SOFT POWER.

”

**LEELA SAMSON**

Renowned Bharatnatyam Dancer  
and Author



“

THE OLD WORLD ORDER IS GIVING IN TO THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND THE EMERGENCE OF INDIA AND ASIA IS BEING RECOGNIZED ACROSS THE GLOBE. IT'S NOT OUR MILITARY PROWESS THAT IS BEING ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT THE POWER WE WIELD FROM AN UNDERSTANDING OF OUR RICH HERITAGE. THE ASIAN LENSES FORUM (TALF) IS AN ATTEMPT TO ENABLE TODAY'S YOUTH TO APPRECIATE AND UNDERSTAND THEIR LEGACY AND DRAW INSPIRATION FROM IT.

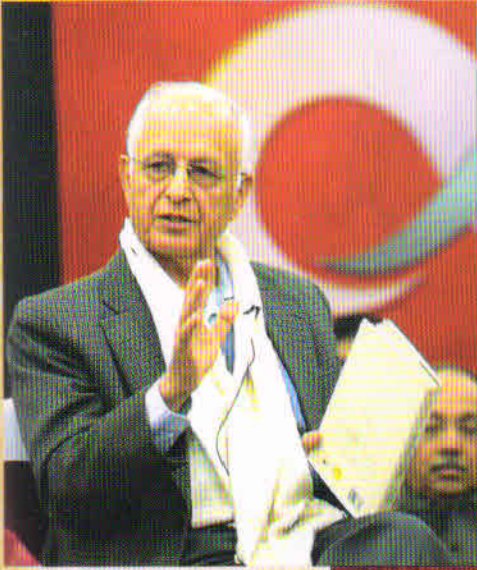
”

**RAJENDRA PAWAR**

Chairman, NIIT Ltd  
& Founder, NIIT University







“ IN A COUNTRY WITH AS MUCH DIVERSITY AS INDIA, ALL INDIANS MUST HAVE WIDE-ANGLE LENSES. WE CANNOT GO AROUND WITH NARROW, SMUDGED LENSES THAT PROVIDE A MYOPIC PERSPECTIVE. WE MUST USE THESE LENSES TO LEARN ABOUT OUR DIVERSITY AND LEARN FROM OUR DIVERSITY. ”

**ARUN MAIRA**

Management Consultant &  
Former Member, Planning Commission of India



“ INDIA SHOULD TEACH ITS CHILDREN ABOUT ITS RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE AS WELL AS INSTIL IN THEM A STRONG VALUE SYSTEM. CULTURE CLASSES ARE IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO KNOW ABOUT INDIA'S CULTURE AND TRADITIONS, AND IN THE ABSENCE OF THESE, LEARNERS ARE LOSING OUT. ”

**VANITA SHASTRI**

Dean of Undergraduate Programs,  
Ashoka University



# EDUCATION, SOFT AND HARD POWER TO SMART POWER

*By Mr. Harpal Singh, Board Member NIIT University, Chairman Emeritus at Fortis*



"India threatens no one" and "is the friend to many" said Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott in response to signing a deal with India to sell uranium. The explicit choice of words reflects a rather rare and compelling image of an emerging super power in the multipolar world. An image that has the potential to combine what is traditionally spoken of as hard and soft power to what may well be the way of the future, the use of smart power. Nations are recognizing the importance of smart power as are students as they prepare themselves for positions of leadership in industry, politics and in the social arena. How does India stack up on this development?

India is emerging as a major economic and political power. It is today the world's third largest economy in purchasing parity terms and also the world's largest democracy with a pluralist media system, setting India as an exceptional demonstration of soft power in the age of mediated international relations. The country has an opportunity to exploit something that many powers like China and Russia lack – the ability to charm through cultural and social links, aid and genuine trust. Upholding that spirit, PM Modi began his premiership with a much appreciated spurt of diplomatic activity. He said "India should leverage its great traditions and culture in forging ties with countries around the world in a way that is deeper, more personal, and therefore, far more powerful". Accepting PM's urge to support the promotion of yoga around the world, The United Nations General Assembly declared June 21 as the annual 'International Day of Yoga'. Modi argued that "Yoga embodies unity of mind and body; thought and action; restraint and fulfilment". Increasingly Indian leadership is recognizing the power of soft power and the incredible asset reservoir it has for its exploitation.

India has a vast arsenal available to it to extend its influence over the world including through its hard power which is reflected in its commitment to enhance its defence capabilities by arguably being the largest buyer of arms and armaments in the world. Whilst aircraft, guns, war ships and missiles constitute aspects of hard power, components of India's soft power are as diverse as films and Bollywood, Yoga, ayurveda, political pluralism, cuisine, religious diversity and openness to global influences and can be dated back to (Nehru's) ideas and practices of nonalignment and not to mention our principled stand on non-proliferation. While the successful export of cultural products such as Bollywood across the world has helped raise awareness of Indian culture and modified existing stereotypes, other soft power elements such as the stability of India's democracy over more than 60 years, especially in a neighborhood rife with ethnic conflicts, have rightly inspired many societies to seek emulation. Buddhism spread from India to China and beyond, leading to a sustained exchange of ideas since ancient times. Similarly, preachers from India have spread the values of Islam across Asia to Singapore and Malaysia creating a generational and emotional link between our countries that would otherwise take significant resources to build.



In a similar vein, India's large diaspora is unquestionably another major soft power asset for Indian diplomacy. There are today millions of Indians spread around the world. Beyond the well known locations such as the US and UK, Indians have settled in Fiji, Malaysia, Mauritius, South Africa, Trinidad and other places around the globe. These immigrants have come to play major roles in the social and political life of host countries providing India valuable access to politicians, businessmen, musicians, innovators and the like. For example, the educated Indian-American community has played an important role in improving Indo-US relations by lobbying American politicians and by giving a positive image of India to the American public. Unknowingly and without stated intent India has built an enviable foundation of soft power with unlimited potential. There have additionally been other intentful initiatives as well.

India is a significant aid donor to countries in the neighbourhood and it does this by extending aid largely in the soft arena. The Afghanistan example is interesting as India has direct national interests at stake in the stabilisation of that country and does this by building roads, bridges and schools whilst deliberately refusing to send any military aid. Its \$2 billion spend in Afghan infrastructure, including hospitals and rural electricity projects matches the support that India gives to Bhutan whose annual budget is almost totally funded by Indian aid. Reconstruction projects aside, being able to export culture is a sign of true soft power and Bollywood is no exception. The popularity of Indian cinema in Asia and now in many parts of the world is undeniable and is so pervasive that according to a 2007 Wikileaks cable, the U.S. asked India to send its Bollywood stars to Afghanistan to "help bring attention to social issues." India's film industry, popularly dubbed 'Bollywood', is probably the largest and farthest reaching medium for Indian culture. Africa has also been a notable recipient of Indian aid providing benefit in the form of relationships with African oil producing countries. The investment has paid rich dividends as Africa accounted for 16 percent and the second largest source of crude oil for India. Even more directly, cricket has proved to be a strong soft power resource for India, with cricket diplomacy having notably positive effects in reducing Indo-Pakistani tensions on many an occasion including the very recent congratulatory call by PM Modi to his Pakistani counterpart wishing Pakistan well in the impending world cup.

However, no other competency has the potential to impact soft and hard power of a country than the power of education. From primary to higher education, the benefits of excellence are innumerable. Both India and the US have benefited by IIT graduates who fuelled economic growth through innovation in Silicon valley and the IT industry in India. It is interesting to note that whilst economic development is viewed as an attribute of hard power, educational institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), NIIT etc. have redefined the image of India as an intellectual hub and attract students from around the world reinforcing education's credentials as a vital lever for building soft power strength. Even more importantly students are learning that real value lies in an education that builds competencies which combine soft and hard power into smart power. For this, knowledge must arguably be seamless and contextually relevant for it to be effective and useful. University systems are increasingly emphasizing the importance of multicultural learning and enhancing student capabilities in understanding different and multiple perspectives. The recent setting up of the TALF (The Asian Lenses Forum) initiative by NIIT University is significant and relevant in this context. Increasingly students are realizing that they have become an important cog in the exercise of power by nations. A growing number of countries are building knowledge centers to match the likes of American and British universities. Australia, Canada and Singapore being notable examples. India needs to accelerate its educational agenda and further strengthen its arsenal of soft power. If the education India provides is seamless and contextually relevant, it could well have laid the foundation of building future competency in Smart power and hence acquire a cutting edge capability to influence, and on occasion impose, its will in the larger interest of the country if not of the world.



# CHASING DOWN THE PAST

ENTREPRENEURS AND PHILANTHROPISTS ARE FINDING A GROWING MARKET FOR ANCIENT INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE.

BY HINDOL SENGUPTA

PHOTOGRAPH BY BANDEEP SINGH

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ncient India is attracting big money these days. Filled by a sense of lost history at a time when India dreams of yet another stab at superpower status, entrepreneurs are funding projects that translate, simplify, and highlight achievements of Indian history for a postmodern generation.

These enterprises are both philanthropic and commercial but the goal is the same—to help Indians understand their own civilisational values and skills. Rohan Murty's \$5.2 million (Rs 32.8 crore) Murty Classical Library series of books published by Harvard University Press, or NIIT founder Rajendra Pawar's university courses under the Asian Lens Forum, or Mohandas Pai's yet-untitled project—these are all businesses that come from a deep-seated sense that modern India has little sense of its historical importance.

Manjul Bhargava, professor of mathematics at Princeton and winner of one of the world's biggest mathematics prizes, the Fields Medal (and recently awarded the Padma Shri), sensed this lack of interest in history at the 102nd Indian Science Congress earlier this year. While the congress had Nobel Prize-winners and senior academicians from across the world presenting papers and chairing sessions, the me-



Inside: Fortune India features

'The Asian Lenses Forum' (TALF) by NIIT University

FORTUNE INDIA



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dia, he later complained to his friend Rohan Murty, only covered a single paper. To explain: One of the sessions, 'Ancient Sciences through Sanskrit', included a presentation on ancient Indian aviation technology, where the presenters spoke of how Vedic Indians flew around in aeroplanes that could move sideways and back, as well as up, down, and forward. The other presentations at this session were about real science and achievements, but in the frenzy of poking holes in made-up science, they received almost no coverage. This is what Murty, Pawar, and Pai are hoping to rectify, at least in part.

**MURTY, SON OF INFOSYS** founder N.R. Narayana Murthy, and a Ph.D. in computer science from Harvard, has given \$5.2 million to set up the Murty Classical Library series of English translations of classical Indian works published by Harvard University Press. "I firmly believe that if we do not know where we come from, we will never know where we are going," says Murty, explaining the endowment.

Mohandas Pai, chairman of Manipal Global Education and a former Infosys director, says private money in the West efficiently created "a world view that puts the West at the heart of history". It's time, he says, for Indian money to do the same. Pai adds that he was inspired by Murty's effort to make ancient Indian classics accessible; his plan is to set up an institute to support research on ancient India. Pai won't say how much he is spending on the yet-unnamed institute but says it will finance research projects such as those of the Indologist Rajiv Malhotra and make them accessible to the public. Malhotra, who has researched ancient Indian history, culture, and Hinduism for 30 years and written bestselling books on the subject, has argued that Western social sciences are often inadequate in understanding Indian philosophical constructs.

Then, there's Rajendra Pawar's NIIT, one of the country's early technical training institutes, which offers courses in ancient history. "I remember a conversation with a friend from abroad who spoke to me about Delhi's history, about how [the city has] seven histories. And I felt ashamed that I didn't know enough about this. That got me thinking," says Pawar, who set up NIIT University five years ago to teach management and technology. For a year now, it has also hosted the Asian Lens Forum, an initiative that the university launched in February 2014 to sensitise youth to their rich culture and history.

The idea, says Pawar, is to "create seamless classrooms so that anyone, anywhere, can access the treasures of Indian heritage. What we are trying to do in every discipline is to point out—emphatically—what Indian contributions were to global knowledge". NIIT University has budgeted Rs 250 crore for this expansion over the next five years, of which more than Rs 5 crore will go towards events.

**IT IS NOT NEW** for entrepreneurs to finance the rediscovery of national heritage and culture; in the U.S., the Rockefeller family and Andrew Carnegie, who introduced the modern idea of institutional philanthropy, financed schools and institutes of research that built the edifice of American exceptionalism. The Rockefellers, for instance, funded much of the early pioneering research on race relations.

The projects that Murty, Pai, and Pawar are funding carry forward the work that 19th-century classicists of the Bengal Renaissance began. Back

**"THERE IS STILL A DEEP-SEATED INFERIORITY COMPLEX AMONG US. WE HAVE TO REDISCOVER OUR IDENTITY."**

**RAJENDRA PAWAR,  
FOUNDER, NIIT UNIVERSITY**

then, Nathaniel Halhed, William Jones, Henry Colebrooke, and Raja Rammohun Roy translated several ancient Indian works into English and other languages. Roy, from the aristocratic landed gentry, also bankrolled similar projects by other intellectuals. In fact, Sheldon Pollock, now founding editor of the Murty Classical Library of India, was looking for a modern equivalent of Roy when he was put in touch with Murty.

Pollock, a leading Indologist and Sanskrit scholar, had been editor of the Clay Sanskrit Library (which had brought out 56 volumes of Sanskrit literature translated into English), till American philanthropist John Clay withdrew funding. Pollock wanted to continue his job of bringing out good translations of ancient Indian literature. It was an idea Murty had been toying with since 2008, when he was a student at Harvard, and began studying Indian philosophy after decades of studying the Western systems. He began to talk about his interest with Parimal Patil, professor of religion and Indian philosophy, and the chair for South Asian Studies at Harvard. Taking Patil's classes drove Murty to understand that "there was a market and a demand that we have been completely missing".++

A common friend put Murty in touch with Pollock, and the Murty Classical Library was born. Pollock told the young computer engineer that his area of operation could be widened—at almost the same cost. "Why only Sanskrit?" he asked Murty. "Why not all Indian classical languages?" Pollock talks about the venture as one of the "biggest projects of translation of classics ever done in the world".





Reuben Singh, Pawar's  
Asian Lens Forum  
at NIIT University aims  
to show exposure to  
global Indian heritage.

Murty says he understood scale and impact talking to Pollock. "He took the idea to a whole different level," says Murty. "In a venture like this, I realised scale was critical. We needed to think really big." At the moment, the project is looking at bringing out at least 500 books—some five a year—translated from around 20 languages. The first set of books features languages such as Pali, Persian, old Telugu, and Punjabi, and include works such as the story of Manu, the first volume of the history of Akbar, and poems of the first Buddhist women.

**"BECAUSE WE WERE** subjugated for so long, we forgot how to look at history our way," says Pai. That's a sentiment Pawar agrees with. "There is still a deep-seated inferiority complex among us," he says. "We have to rediscover our identity." Pai elaborates, saying that though some of the

early British colonisers tried to understand Indian culture and even translated the Vedas and Upanishads into English, by the 18th century, the British began seeing themselves as a race whose customs needed to be imposed on the locals. The result, says Pai, is that by the time India gained independence in 1947, "we had learnt to be ashamed of ourselves".

It's not a question of denying the ills of the past like casteism, says Pai. But in the enthusiasm to cleanse the system of these ills, the baby tends to get thrown out with the bathwater. What does an Indian school student learn about the great philosophical treasures of India, asks Pai. Murty echoes this sentiment: "I had to do this project because otherwise, for all you know, the next generation would think that Indian history began in the 15th or 16th century."

Pawar approaches this a little differently with the Asian Lens Forum, an 'experimental classroom' where speakers sit on a revolving stage with cameras on all sides and with a live and virtual audience of students. NIIT University's curricula are being revamped to ensure that every course has new portions which talk about the achievements of India—from ancient mathematics to history, geography, and culture. These lessons will also be made available online to anyone around the world, not just to students but also to teachers in other colleges. Meeta Sengupta, a former J.P. Morgan investment banker-turned-educationist who ran the India Centre at the London Business School and is a Salzburg Global Seminar Fellow, will be teaching one of the courses. "The process of disseminating a sense of history in civic society is an important assertion, perhaps even an antidote to extremism based on false assertions. If people really know the truth, they can't be carried away by hyperbole," she says.

That, in a nutshell, is what this entire business is based on. There are signs that some of this thinking is being encouraged by the Modi government. The government has appointed Bhargava, who cites ancient Indian mathematicians like Aryabhata and Brahmagupta among his inspirations, as the nodal person for a new initiative to get 1,000 U.S. academics to teach short-term courses, mainly in science and technology, at Indian colleges.

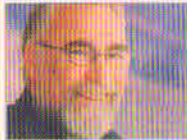
With the private and public sectors joining hands to reclaim the past, the next Science Congress will perhaps celebrate much more than apocryphal aeroplanes. ■

**FEEDBACK** [letters@fortuneindia.com](mailto:letters@fortuneindia.com)



# The emergence of India as a global soft power

India can be in an advantageous position if she can build on her rich heritage of learning as well as incredibly rich and dynamic artistic legacy, including classical and contemporary



JEAN-PIERRE LEHMANN

**T**he paradigm that prevailed in world affairs throughout most of the 20th century was shattered by a series of rapid simultaneous discontinuities that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the World Wide Web (both in 1989), the implosion of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War; the market-oriented reforms undertaken in erstwhile 'third world' countries and the rise of South-South economic and political exchange, and the paralytic middle in global governance—whether trade, finance, climate, etc. The apparent eradication of barriers heralded the coinage and subsequent mass utilisation of the term 'globalisation'. Contrary to initial assumptions, we were witnessing neither the emergence of a 'borderless world', nor 'the end of history', nor even a 'new world order', but perhaps more accurately a chaotic transition to uncertainty.

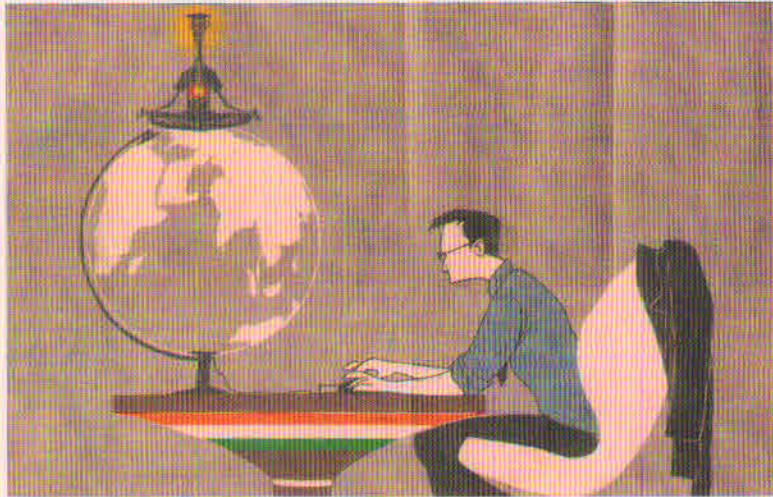
As confusion reigns, global turbulence increases. Though the hard power of geopolitics remains prevalent, increasingly countries vie—for influence, for investment, for retention and attraction of both native and foreign human talent, and for meaning and identity—in the realm of soft power.

Hard power is the power to impose; soft power is the power to influence, to attract, and to beguile. American hard power may be in decline militarily, but the soft power of, say, Silicon Valley and American universities still provides it with immense global advantage in the realm of high-technology and innovation. Indian scientists are attracted to the US by its high-tech soft power.

Though hard power will obviously continue to count in a world of instability and insecurity, soft power will be increasingly relevant and important.

Soft power is critical not only for a nation's role in the world, but also for purposes of identity and, ultimately, prosperity. It is a difficult concept, but not woolly. To give only one example: a country with reasonably radiant soft power will appear attractive to its diaspora, thereby reinforcing important links both for talent and for wealth.

Interestingly, the resurgence of Asia as a continent is resting significantly on the rise of its 'soft power'. Asian tigers, including nations such as India and China that are gradually tilting the global economic balance, are emerging



as powerful 'influencers' in the new international economic order.

The 'soft power' showcased by Asia's leading nations has also catalysed the creation of the Asian Lenses—a new and compelling Asian identity and a new way for the world to view Asia.

## Soft power and India

Throughout much of history, Indians have possessed little, if any, hard power, as it was exercised by its colonial masters: the Mughals, the British. It is only since 1947 that India has been in a position to develop and exercise hard power.

Throughout history on the other hand, India has exercised considerable soft power, whether intentionally or not. The spiritual impacted on the political. Few individuals had as much global soft power as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Though assassinated in 1948, his spirit and influence lived on for decades, notably in the civil rights movement in the US led by Martin Luther King and the struggle against apartheid through the leadership of Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

The Cold War was a confrontation of both hard power and soft power between the West and the Soviet Union. Nations were cajoled or indeed forced into taking sides. India was not and could not be in that game as a major player; it was both economically and militarily too weak. However, India exercised a good deal of soft power by inventing and choosing an alternative option guaranteeing independence: non-alignment.

In the Cold War world of hard power and ideological confrontation, not just in military terms, but also in economic

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policies, India was able to exercise considerable international soft power.

But that world is now over. How does India adjust its soft power in this rapidly evolving turbulent environment of the early 21st century?

Soft power in this context is an extension of a nation's image abroad, but also a reflection of a nation's domestic image and vision. What do Indians, especially young Indians, think it means to be Indian? How can the sought-after global soft power impact and influence domestic policies and national psychology? The two questions, what kind of role India aspires to globally and what kind of society does it aspire to nationally are interlinked. What are the values that should define India's national and global identity?

These questions lead us yet again to the issue of the Asian Lens. India has to take leadership in ensuring that, today, the world looks at the continent through new Asian Lenses and understands the region through Asian eyes.

Going forward, Asia and India can be in an advantageous position if they can build on their rich heritage of learning as well as incredibly rich and dynamic artistic legacy, including classical and

contemporary. These dimensions can feature in India's global soft power. In a world increasingly given to GDP-ism, where culture is sidelined, Indian youth can ensure that the country's learning and artistic legacies are sustained, enriched and expanded.

India has seized on the slogan 'Make-in-India', with the ambition of transforming the economy into a global manufacturing hub. This is seen as essential in creating employment for the millions of youth coming on to the labour market. India can integrate the soft power feature in this particular dimension of hard power. Its engineers, for instance, can be key drivers of soft power.

In his book, *The Idea of India*, Sunil Khilnani has estimated that Indians will become the most prolific and dynamic writers in the English language. Whatever happens in soft power and other realms in the planet, English will remain the global language. English-language literature by Indian authors too can contribute to the projection of India's soft power.

Thus, in looking at this opening decade-and-a-half of the 21st century, one can hypothesise that whereas it is more than likely that China will emerge as the next global hard power, India can and should emerge as a 21st century global soft power. India can be the global hub of intellectual, spiritual and artistic creativity and the vehicle for the creation of Asian Lenses.

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**The 2nd Asian Lenses Forum (TALF) deliberates on the 'Emergence of India as a Global Soft Power'**  
NEW DELHI, March 23, 2015

- *Witnesses thought-provoking discussions from intellectuals on the growing significance of India and Asian countries in today's global scenario*
- *First-of-its-kind initiative by NIIT University to sensitize young generation to Asian heritage, culture, history and values, TALF gains wider acceptance and following*

Established with a vision to bring about innovation in higher education and learning in emerging areas of the knowledge society, the not-for-profit NIIT University (NU) presented The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Asian Lenses Forum (TALF) conference in the capital today. With an aim to focus on India's presence in the world scenario as a rising soft power, this year's TALF Conference deliberated on the 'Emergence of India as a Global Soft Power.'

A unique initiative by NIIT University, The Asian Lenses Form (TALF) is an outward looking coalition of committed thought leaders, opinion makers and informed youth. TALF aims to prepare the young Asian generations to find their place in this rapidly changing global environment by providing them with a deeper understanding of what it means to be Asian. As a platform it seeks to generate relevant knowledge and encourage multiple dialogues, engaging stakeholders across generations and nationalities.

The prominent speakers this year who highlighted various aspects of India as a 'soft power' were diplomat and author Pavan Varma; Dr Ashok Khosla who has written extensively on Sustainable Development; renowned Bharatanatyam dancer and author Leela Samson; and award-winning journalist & author of an incisive book on China – 'Smoke & Mirrors', Pallavi Aiyar. The conversations were anchored by Dr Jean-Pierre Lehmann, Professor Emeritus at IMD Lausanne, visiting Professor at NIIT University (NU) and an exceptional Asianist who has invested a majority of his scholarly pursuits in understanding Asia and globalization. Also present were Rajendra Pawar, Founder, NIIT University; members of the NU Board including Harpal Singh, Chairman Emeritus, Fortis and Dr. Rajendra Pandey, President, NIIT University.

The unique format of the event made the session truly engaging and intense. It showcased a new-age classroom set-up wherein the key speakers were seated on a rotating stage in the middle of the hall, with concentric circles of seating around it. This enabled eye contact between everyone in the hall, creating an opportunity to interact closely with panelists, thus stimulating a free-flowing exchange of ideas. The presentations were informal, crisp and dynamic, inviting discussion and debate on India as an emerging 'soft power.' Students from NIIT University campus in Neemrana, connected real-time to the conference through state-of-the-art technology enabled interface and asked incisive questions to the panelists.

Speaking on occasion, Rajendra Pawar, Chairman, NIIT Ltd & Founder, NIIT University said, "The old world order is giving in to the new world order and the emergence of India and Asia is being recognized across the globe. It's not our military prowess that is being acknowledged, but the power we wield from an understanding of our rich heritage. The Asian Lenses Forum (TALF) is an attempt to enable today's youth to appreciate and understand their legacy and draw inspiration from it."

"Hence for India to assert its dominance as a global soft power it is important for our youth to comprehend and recognize the legacy that nurtures this power", added Mr. Pawar.

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2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL TAFI CONFERENCE





PUSHINDER SINGH

NIIT UNIVERSITY, NEEMRANA





# NIIT UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE

Set up with the vision of being the leading center of innovation and learning in emerging areas of the Knowledge Society, the not-for-profit NIIT University is dedicated to building great careers and ensuring excellent job opportunities to all its students. It has been developed as an institution of excellence to provide exceptional education based on the **four core principles that make learning industry-linked, technology-based, research-driven and seamless.**

The NIIT University offers **B. Tech Programs** in Computer Science Engineering, Biotechnology, Mechanical and Electronic and Communication Engineering, **M. Tech Programs** in Educational Technology, & Geographic Information Systems and **Ph.D Programs** in Humanities & Social Sciences and management in addition to all the above disciplines.

Dual degree integrated 5 year B. Tech - **MTech Programs** in Computer Science Electronics & Communication, Mechanical engineering, Educational Technology, Geographic Information Systems and Biotechnology are also offered by NU. These contemporary and industry-relevant programs are customized to prepare skilled professionals and researchers for high-end mobile computing and wireless, communication technology and biotechnology jobs. Highly qualified faculty, state-of-the-art laboratories, associations with research labs and research universities

in USA and UK, strong wireless stimulation, performance and modeling concepts are other unique features of these programs.

NIIT University has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the University of Missouri - Kansas City's (UMKC) School of Computing and Engineering, to offer a 5-year program that will allow students to secure B. Tech degree from NU & and MS in Computer Science Engineering from UMKC. This is the first of its kind landmark agreement between two educational institutions to collaborate in B.Tech and MS degree programs and research activities through the exchange of degree seeking students and faculty members in the area of computer science and computer engineering.

The University also offers an **MBA Program (NU-MBA)** designed to help aspiring professionals build meaningful connections to the real world of business and become successful leaders of the future. NU-MBA trains future CEOs to deal with the challenges and opportunities thrown up by emerging economies such as China and countries in Africa through its 'International Immersion program'. The University also offers industry-linked program in **MBA (Banking & Finance)** in collaboration with ICICI Bank.

NIIT University has entered into a partnership with Autodesk to promote 'Design Thinking' as a course across all

disciplines of B.Tech Programs. NIIT University has a unique 'Microsoft Innovation Centre' on campus that features the best of equipment, the latest technology & expert guidance that fosters an environment of learning & entrepreneurship on campus. The **Asian Lenses Forum** has been set-up at NIIT University to sensitize young generation and to create a sense of pride in Asian/Indian heritage, culture, history and values amongst youth. The forum will also act as a launching pad for the faculty and student bodies of NU to undertake research and disseminate knowledge about achievements and role of Asia to the world.

Vibrant social and recreational activities form the heart of Campus Life at NIIT University, with a host of student activities interspersed along the central walking spine. The Campus provides students a wide array of sports activities like volleyball, basketball, tennis, a golf putting range and gymnastics. Furnished student hostels make life comfortable for students. Temperatures are maintained at the Campus all year around using an energy-efficient, geothermal cooling system, with minimal carbon footprint.

**For further information please visit [www.niituniversity.in](http://www.niituniversity.in)**



## WHAT IS TALF?

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The Asian Lenses Forum aims to sensitize the coming Asian generations to the rich and diverse legacies of Asia, with the aim of creating a sense of identity, direction and vision as a beacon for the "Asian 21<sup>st</sup> Century".

By fostering a better understanding of the past, the inherent objective is to establish a robust foundation for Asia's youth to build an aspirational future. The Asian Lenses Forum will also act as a launching pad for the faculty and student bodies of NU to undertake research and disseminate knowledge about the challenges, achievements and roles of Asian societies in the globalized world.



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