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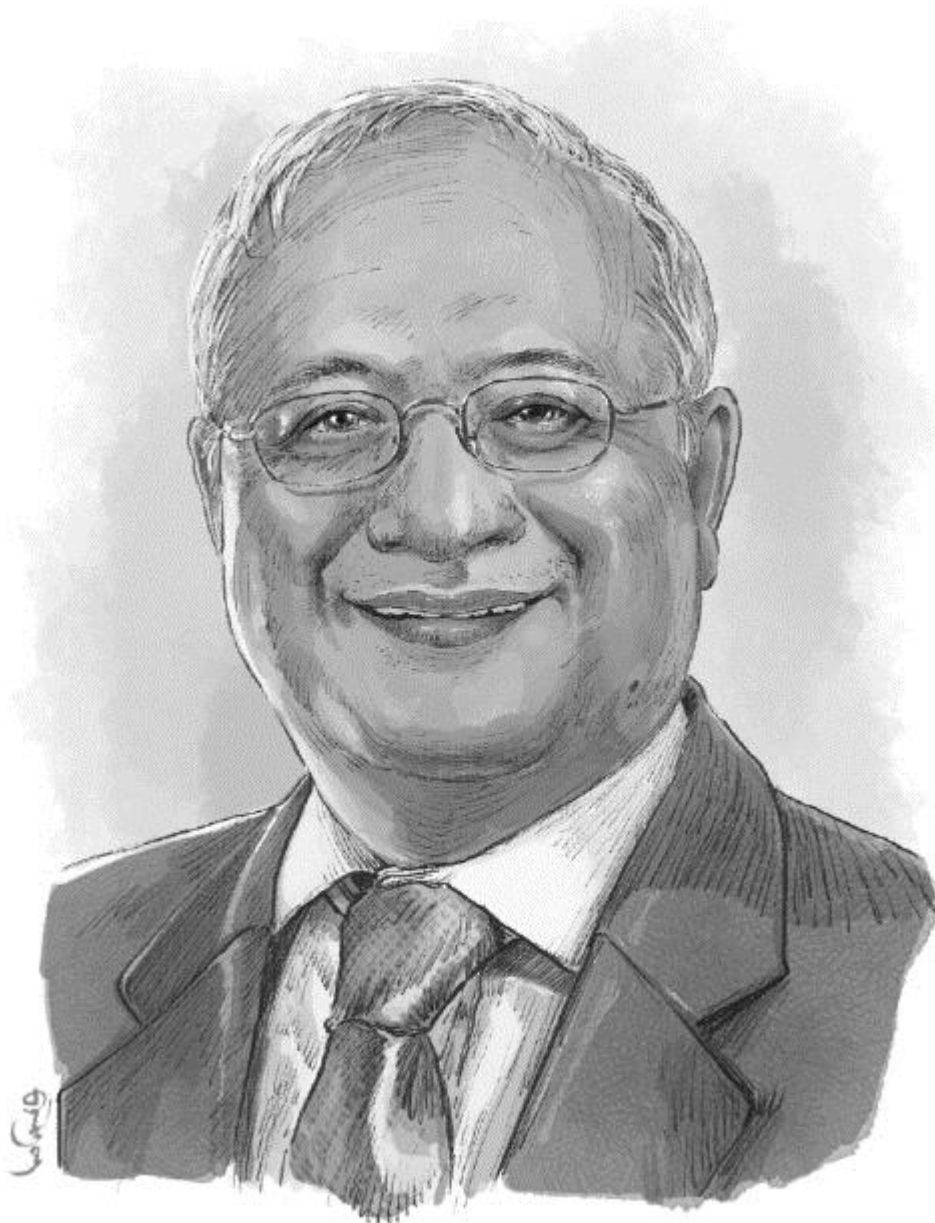
Headline: Beyond the horizon

## Beyond the horizon

**Veteran Sinophile Girija Pande believes the capacity of China and India to work together will be key to future of Asia's economic growth**

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BY INDRAJIT BASU



If you are Chinese and happen to meet Girija Pande at his office, the veteran Sinophile from India who has spent decades doing business in China is sure to greet you with a warm "ni hao". And while you are in his company, he will comfortably chat with you in Mandarin.

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"Ever since the mid-1980s, when I landed in China with a new job based in Hong Kong, I have witnessed the economic miracle of China unfold," he says. "For the past 12 years I have also been a part of (this) economic growth story."

Pande says that, in his lifetime, he has witnessed China lifting more than 300 million of its people out of poverty—a feat the world has never before seen—so he can't help but marvel at the nation's economic achievements.

"I realized the importance of building a business in China and decided I had to learn their language if I (was going) to be successful," he says.

While admitting he is no master of Mandarin, he says his knowledge of the language has helped him build bridges and understand cultural nuances. "And I found that very useful in dealing with our customers and partners."

Having spent over a decade establishing the Chinese operations for the information technology consultancy business of Indian conglomerate the Tata Group, Pande is now executive chairman of Apex Avalon Consulting, a Singapore-based joint venture between Apex Advisors of Singapore and India's largest management consulting firm, Avalon Consulting.

He is a strong advocate for crafting a roadmap for Indian and Chinese investors to enter or expand in the other's country.

He believes that the future of Asia, and the realization of the Asian century, lies in the growth of India and China and the two countries' capacity to work together.

"In discussions about India and China, I find that many commentators are too focused on the present and do not look beyond the horizon," he says. "But when you look beyond the present, you will find that these are two economic giants in Asia—one a \$9 trillion economy growing at 5 to 6 percent in the long term and the other a \$2 trillion (economy) growing at about 7 to 8 percent."

Assuming that each maintains a long-term growth rate of 6 percent, he says, these two economies are going to add trillions of dollars of GNP to the world in around 12 years, the time that each will take to double the size of their economies.

"Therefore, to complement each other, they have to grow the economic pie ... they have to grow for each other and together," he says. "And if these two countries are closely aligned in trade, they can generate out-of-proportion returns for each other. And that is what I see beyond the horizon."

Pande's tryst with China started when he moved to Hong Kong to work for the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group in 1985. One of his responsibilities was to set up operations for ANZ Funds Management in Beijing.

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"When we set up office in Beijing, there were only bicycles all around and few other forms of transport. It was not easy to get English-speaking office staff back then," he says.

In 2000, he was handpicked by the Tata Group to build the regional business for their IT company Tata Consultancy Services. It is now Asia's largest IT company, with a market capitalization of over \$70 billion.

"I was instrumental in setting up TCS's APAC (Asia-Pacific) headquarters in Singapore in 2001 and pioneered its business growth in APAC, including China," Pande says. During his tenure, TCS expanded to over 11,000 associates in 14 countries in the region.

Pande also founded and spearheaded TCS's joint venture with the Chinese government in Beijing and was instrumental in strategizing and building its Chinese business. Today, TCS has more than 2,000 Chinese associates in six cities in China, he says.

Fourteen years of close ties with China have enabled Pande to build wide-ranging business contacts in the region.

For instance, he was economic adviser to the mayor of Guangzhou, China's third-largest city, and has been a speaker on a number of occasions at the World Economic Forums and the Boao Forums in China.

He also serves on the advisory board of Singapore Management University and on the board of the Institute of South Asian Studies, an affiliate of the National University of Singapore.

However, despite his knowledge and experience, Pande's business success in China did not come without a share of anxiety. "I was frequently confronted with the question of whether we will be successful in China," he says.

After over a decade with the Tatas, Pande stepped down from TCS in 2013 to start Apex Avalon Consulting. The company specializes in providing management consulting, research and analytics services to businesses in the fast-growing Asia-Pacific market.

To share his China experience, Pande also recently coauthored a book on the growing commercial ties between India and China, called *The Silk Road Rediscovered: How Indian and Chinese Companies Are Becoming Globally Stronger by Winning in Each Other's Markets*.

Although bilateral investments between the two countries—at less than \$1 billion—are small compared to their \$69 billion in bilateral trade, the picture is rapidly changing, according to Pande.

"Both Chinese and Indian businessmen are rediscovering the fabled silk route." He says this is reflected in explosive trade growth—a more than 23-fold increase in the last 14 years—and the rising number of Chinese and Indian companies setting up operations in each other's countries.

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But Pande also feels that the two countries have not yet explored the best of each other.

"Growing integration between the two will offer new opportunities, as well as new competitive challenges to their companies," he says.

Pande says that just as the United States and Canada have learned to complement one another, China and India will need to match their market economies if they want their respective growth to benefit Asia.

He says that Indian and Chinese companies must design their strategies from a global perspective.

"For instance, India needs to remember that the bedrock of manufacturing is good infrastructure, which is still lacking in India. So, India must invite China to build its infrastructure," he says. "Few countries can beat China in building infrastructure at low cost, because China has created such huge capacities."

Similarly, the growing number of Chinese companies with global ambitions have little choice but to look across the Himalayas and see India, one of the world's largest markets, sitting right next door, he adds.

Pande tells of a vision he has about the two countries and their growing ties. He visualizes a large conference room, with a grand signing ceremony taking place for two major deals.

In one of these deals, a consortium of companies from China's rail sector is signing a joint-venture agreement with Indian Railways for the manufacture and installation of high-speed locomotives and rolling stock that will transform the speeds of major express trains by a factor of three.

In the other deal, one of India's top pharmaceutical companies is signing a major licensing agreement with the Chinese Academy of Sciences to introduce an oncology drug developed in India for the Chinese healthcare market.

"This is what I see happening within this decade, when we will see a growing commercial relationship between the two countries that will underpin the economic growth and success of Asia," he says.

"That's because, when India and China flourish together, the whole of Asia benefits and flourishes," Pande says.