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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Soft Power Dynamics of Pakistan: A Study on Its Ability to  
Shape Regional Perceptions and Relations**

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**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this research is to investigate the soft power capabilities of Pakistan, with a particular focus on how these capabilities might enhance its diplomatic ties with neighbouring nations in the region. Pakistan holds significant geopolitical importance within the region; nevertheless, it has not prioritised the cultivation of strong diplomatic ties with neighbouring nations. Diplomatic isolation results as a consequence of this outcome. It cannot progress alone without the other regional countries. Qualitative research methodologies are utilised. Pakistan has to consider the concerns expressed by neighbouring countries in order to initiate positive diplomatic ties. Pakistan is deeply connected to the region both culturally and religiously, and it has the potential to strengthen these links through many means like regional connectivity, cultural exchange programmes, and trade. Encouraging people-to-people interaction programs can build up the ties between the nations.

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**KEYWORDS** Pakistan, Region, Soft Power

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**Introduction**

Pakistan holds significant geopolitical importance within the region; nevertheless, it has not prioritised the cultivation of positive diplomatic relations or exerting influence over neighbouring countries. No country or nation can develop without taking its neighbour. If there are issues near the border of Pakistan, then the attention of all machinery will be deployed on that conflict not on the progress. Pakistan has upheld its importance on the global stage as a result of its involvement in the Cold War and its participation in the war against terrorism. With the US military's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US campaign against terrorism came to an end. Pakistan lost significance in the region once more since the USA no longer required Pakistan's assistance. The allocation of funds designated for security and development under the umbrella of US aid has been halted. The Pakistani economy once again encountered a deficit in its foreign exchange reserves. Pakistan's economy stayed away from innovation, production and exports. Above all, it stayed away from regional connectivity which resulted in the form of diplomatic isolation and trade deficit.

The perception of Pakistan in the developed world is unfavourable. Several significant elements contribute to the negative portrayal of Pakistan, including a fragile democratic framework, economic challenges, high illiteracy rates, a hybrid system with

military dominance, political instability, inadequate institutional structures, and the presence of extremist organisations. Other factors such as sluggish economic growth and limited resources serve as barriers for potential investors. India's rapid economic growth and consistent policy framework have engendered a strong appeal among foreign investors and nations. It has been effective in various platforms in tarnishing the reputation of Pakistan and its armed forces. It also sought to establish its dominance in regional politics. Several other small regional countries also feel insecure about Indian hegemony. Pakistan can achieve significant progress and development in the region. It is the second largest country in the region, following India.

Pakistan is enhancing its regional reputation through the initiation of trade and economic endeavours. It has too much potential in soft power areas to influence the region. Due to the phenomenon of globalisation and the widespread availability of communication channels, there has been an increased global interest in the affairs of others. Regional connectivity and cultural exchange programs are assets for its soft image.

### **Literature Review**

Regional integration through culture and economy resulted in common foreign policy objectives which is a way to peace and prosperity (Gilani & Talib, 2020). The government of Pakistan has taken several initiatives to make its image better through soft power instruments in regional politics (Saifullah & Qaisrani, 2022). Pakistan faces numerous problems in the region, particularly about its image. However, it may cultivate good relationships with neighbouring nations, which in turn would lead to economic growth and regional development. Soft power can serve as a means to strengthen relationships. Peace in Afghanistan can bring prosperity and progress to Pakistan because it is a trade route to Central Asia, in addition, this region has many similar cultural routes (Baqai & Wasi, 2021).

### **Material and Methods**

This research uses Qualitative research methods encompassing analytical, descriptive, and case study approaches. Case studies have the capacity to analyze certain soft power activities undertaken by other regional powers. The study may be explanatory, descriptive or exploratory in order to comprehend the objectives.

### **Soft Power**

In the realm of international politics, the concept of soft power refers to the capacity to exert influence over other nations without resorting to armed coercion. Various factors contribute to the dissemination and influence of ideas, practices, and institutions across different societies. These factors encompass cultural, traditional, and value systems, as well as political structures, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations, esteemed educational institutions, scholarship initiatives, scientific breakthroughs, entertainment, music, sports, good governance, international assistance, and bilateral or multilateral agreements.

Soft Power word is described by Joseph S. Nye in the 1980s; he says "The soft power of a state is derived from various sources, including its cultural appeal, the political systems and ideals it upholds domestically and internationally, and its diplomatic relationships with other states. These instruments demonstrate optimal

performance when they are duly authorised and possess ethical legitimacy” (Raimzhanova, 2015).

Soft power is intricately connected to policies that are driven by moral or idealistic considerations. However, it is important to acknowledge that soft power may not always be driven by benevolent objectives. In more accessible terms, soft power can be understood as a means of subtly exerting influence through cultural and diplomatic channels, with the potential to be employed for both positive and negative ends. Primarily, soft power is characterised by its intangible nature and its ability to attract and influence others. For example, USAID, UKAID, British Council and Lincoln Corner are the government institutes of the UK and the USA which project the soft image of their country and the nation abroad. In the era of fast communication, hard power works under the cover of soft power. The military brutalities of the countries are hidden by the soft power institutes.

Pakistan is also rich in arts, culture and music; it has thousands of years back civilizations as Mohinjodaro, Harappa and Taxila which make strong linkages to history. It has also made huge progress in many sectors which can also become its soft power assets. CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), cinema and educational scholarships for regional students can be soft power instruments for Pakistan.

### **Akhand Bharat: Challenges by India to the region**

The substantial size of India within the region exerts a significant influence on the economic, societal, and security aspects of the region. The entire region is interconnected by cultural, religious, and historical ties. The culture, fashions, soundtrack, and narrative of Indian films have made a lasting impression on viewers in their neighbouring countries. Bollywood serves as a significant medium for India to establish cultural influence on countries where Urdu/Hindi languages are comprehended. For instance, although there is still tension between Pakistan and India, but Pakistanis are familiar with Bollywood stars, their lines, and their fashion trends. The influence of Indian film has facilitated the acquisition of Hindi/Urdu language skills among individuals from Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, despite Hindi/Urdu not being their official or regional language.

Consequently, the influence of Indian culture and language is permeating the region through Bollywood. The narratives derived from the ancient Indian epics, namely the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata', undergo editorial modifications and cinematic adaptations with the intention of exalting the historical significance of ancient India and appealing to the Hindu and Buddhist communities residing in the region. In addition to this, Indian films also convey to their audience the notion of India's peacefulness and the potential for regional development through the promotion of a unified identity and culture.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi intended to use the Hindus as a tool for soft power by using the statement that all Hindus, wherever they may be, are a single community or family while speaking to Indians abroad. The present Bharatiya Janata Party has enacted legislation pertaining to the citizenship of Hindus residing in adjacent nations such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and others (CRS Report, 2022). This initiative aims to engage the Hindu community and foster a sense of connection and cultural heritage with India. This deliberate move is undertaken with the aim of enhancing its positive perception among the predominantly Hindu population, both

within India and globally. Furthermore, this phenomenon highlights the utilization of religion and culture by the dominant Hindu majority as a symbolic tool in their diplomatic endeavours, portraying it as representative of the entirety of Indian culture.

In addition to India's soft policies towards the region, neighbouring countries express concerns of Indian hegemony in light of the rhetoric espoused by right-wing Indian (BJP) leaders pertaining to the concept of 'Akhand Bharat'. The term "Greater India" refers to a geographical concept encompassing a region that includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. The notion of Akhand Bharat being their ultimate objective is disseminated during gatherings for the public. The concept in question is clearly discussed in the publication titled "Akhand Bharat," which was first released in 1945 (Mookerji, 1945). Movies and documentaries serve the purpose of establishing connections among other countries by exploring the historical religions, civilizations, and customs they share. The governments of neighbouring nations enact policies and make decisions that distinguish them from India, with the aim of safeguarding their sovereignty and preventing the formation of Akhand Bharat. The Indian government's efforts to enhance its soft power in the region have significant implications for the surrounding countries.

## **Regional Engagement through Soft Power**

### **Afghanistan**

The neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan share a lengthy and intricate border, which is inhabited by individuals of Pashtun descent on either side. The histories and heroes of the two nations are identical. Individuals possess family connections and agricultural properties on both ends (Baqai & Wasi, 2021). Pakistan experiences immediate consequences as a result of developments occurring in Afghanistan. The Pakistani government has launched a border fencing initiative, however, it is important to note that this measure cannot create divisions among the general population. For centuries, the Afghan population has endured the consequences of armed conflict. The majority of people saw Pakistan as the source of their problems. The Pakistani military is accused of supporting its proxies to establish a government that aligns with its objectives. Through their proxies in Afghanistan, the other players in the region engage in combat as well.

Pakistan has undertaken numerous initiatives in Afghanistan to cultivate a positive perception among the Afghan citizens. The Pakistani government has undertaken several projects aimed at fostering closer ties between the two countries. These initiatives include the establishment of the Sir Syed Ahmad Khan Post Graduate Faculty of Science and Technology at Nangarhar, the Rehman Baba School and Hostel in Kabul, the Dr. Allama Muhammad Iqbal Faculty of Humanities at Kabul University, the Liaquat Ali Khan Faculty of Engineering at Balkh University, the Muhammad Ali Jinnah Hospital in Kabul, Naib Aminullah Khan Hospital in Logar, and the Nishter Kidney Centre in Jalalabad (Sheraz, 2020). These endeavours reflect the Pakistani government's commitment to enhancing bilateral relations and promoting cooperation between the two nations. The establishment of a regional campus of Allama Iqbal Open University in Kabul is being contemplated to provide convenient access to education for Afghan students. The Pakistani government has played a significant role in facilitating the completion of many roads, schools, and infrastructure programmes in Afghanistan.

The reduction of hostilities among Afghans can be facilitated if Pakistan refrains from interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs and abstains from providing support to any factions. If one faction receives backing, the other faction will likely be perceived as an adversary by Pakistan. Who rules over the people should be decided by them. Pakistan, being a contiguous nation, has the potential to extend assistance to the Afghan government and its populace in various domains such as visa facilitation, educational provisions, healthcare services, and infrastructure development initiatives. As a result, Afghans will have a positive perception of Pakistan and won't participate in efforts to undermine it. The ties between the Afghan people and Pakistan can flourish beyond political boundaries.

### **Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka, a geographically compact country situated in the Indian Ocean, has historically encountered challenges stemming from external involvement by India in its domestic affairs. The Pakistan Army assisted the Sri Lankan military in their efforts to combat insurgency and terrorism, effectively executing successful operations. As a result of this, Sri Lanka and Pakistan enjoy a positive bilateral relationship. The level of trade between Pakistan and Sri Lanka is rather low. In the year 2021, Pakistan's total value of exported goods amounted to 348.48 million US dollars. There exist numerous potential avenues through which Pakistani investors can enhance Pakistan's influence in Sri Lanka. Pakistan also offers scholarships to students from Sri Lanka as a means to enhance its positive image. However, it might be argued that these initiatives alone are inadequate in establishing robust bilateral relations.

### **Bangladesh**

The diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan have been strained as a result of the armed conflict that occurred in 1971. Bangladesh attributes its attainment of independence from Pakistan to the alleged perpetration of severe war crimes by the Pakistani Army against the Bengali nation (Zakaria, 2019). Bangladesh maintains a narrative asserting that Pakistan bears the responsibility to issue an apology for the military operations conducted in Bangladesh. Pakistan does not endorse this narrative; however, it does not exhibit hostility against Bangladesh. India played a significant role in the establishment of Bangladesh, fostering a relationship characterised by amicability and mutual goodwill. Pakistan engages in trade with Bangladesh, and it is evident that there exist several untapped prospects for further development on both ends. Pakistan has the potential to enhance its reputation among the general Bengali population through the implementation of various measures such as the introduction of tourism visas, provision of educational scholarships, facilitation of investments, and offering incentives aimed at mitigating the existing hostilities between the two nations.

### **Nepal and Bhutan**

Both of these countries are landlocked and rely heavily on imports and exports from India. They face pressure from India if they attempt to pursue an autonomous foreign policy. In the year 2008, India implemented a blockade on the oil supply to Nepal, leading to a significant crisis (Muhammad, Rana, & Akbar, 2015). Pakistan has the potential to initiate interpersonal interactions utilizing educational and investment prospects. A significant number of Nepali students pursue medical education from institutes in Pakistan. Education diplomacy can serve as a means to increase the enrolment of students in Pakistani universities.

## **Islamic Republic of Iran**

Iran is an adjacent nation with a long-standing history of cultural and religious interconnectedness with its neighbouring country, fostering a shared heritage that spans centuries. A significant number of Pakistani individuals undertake pilgrimages to Iran to see sacred sites. Iran and India maintain a positive bilateral relationship. India is currently engaged in the development of the Chabahar Port, which is situated close to the Gawadar Port. Iran is currently subject to international sanctions as a result of its nuclear programme. Pakistan faces external pressure from the United States to refrain from engaging in trade with Iran, resulting in the adoption of illicit means such as smuggling to facilitate trade between the two countries. Pakistan also shied away from direct engagement with Iran due to the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, as Saudi Arabia offers economic support to Pakistan and is a significant source of remittances from Pakistanis living abroad. The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia engaged in a conflict within the borders of Pakistan, employing their respective proxy forces, under the pretext of representing the Shia and Sunni sects. This situation resulted in a negative perception of both nations among the educated and knowledgeable citizens of Pakistan. Furthermore, it led to social discontent and a rise in sectarian violence. The reputation of Pakistan has been significantly tarnished as a result of the prevalence of sectarian conflict.

Pakistan is currently confronted with a significant economic and energy issue. However, it has the potential to address this challenge by establishing equitable relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, guided by its strategic objectives. Its economy is hampered by the high cost of gasoline imports. The cost-effective energy resources from Iran have the potential to positively impact the economic conditions of Pakistan. The establishment of trade relations with Iran has the potential to enhance prospects for regional connectivity and foster economic development.

After the COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the world seems to have changed. Most nations of the world face economic crises. The world can move from bipolar to multi-polar because the present status quo cannot be maintained due to major challenges to the peace of the world (Raza, 2020). The Palestine (Hamas) and Israel conflict killed so many lives and unsecured the Arabian Peninsula. Every country has kept their national interests on priority. Pakistan has a great opportunity to engage with Iran to meet its energy crisis beyond international pressure.

## **Central Asian States**

The religious practices, legal principles (Fiqh), mystical traditions (Sufism), cultural practices, linguistic diversity, physical infrastructure, and culinary preferences of Pakistan reflect notable influences from Central Asian civilization. They brought people with them since a large number of invaders came from this region to control here. Once they arrived, they were struck with the culture of the area. Hazrat Usman Ali Hajveri, well recognised as Data Ganj Bakhsh, originated from Central Asia and preached the teachings of Islam within the city of Lahore and its surrounding regions. Another prominent figure in Sufism was Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya Multani, who resided in the region of Multan and served as a source of inspiration for the locals.

Afghanistan is the entry point to the landlocked Central Asian countries from South Asia or Pakistan. All the central Asian countries are far from the seashores. They lack in sea-ports for easy access to the world for trade. Pakistan's seaports can make it easy for Central Asian countries to connect with the world (Rubab, Ali, & Rana, 2022).

The Central Asian region comprises the nations of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Pakistan has the potential to generate toll revenues by facilitating access to seaports for these states through rail and roads. Pakistan has the potential to serve as a strategic gateway to the Asian continent and establish itself as a prominent centre for the manufacturing and services industry.

The Soviet Union's administration forcibly broke up people's relationships after its control over the Central Asian states, but once those states gained their independence, opportunities might once again arise. The restoration of historical links is feasible. The Central Asian States possess abundant mineral and energy resources that have the potential to alleviate Pakistan's energy problems.

### **Maldives**

It is an archipelagic state, which has a majority Muslim population. It is also surrounded by water from all sides. The small country with a low population is also significant due to its presence in the sea-lines of the Indian Ocean. Many powers of the world want military bases in Maldives. Pakistan has limited trade with it which can be enhanced through trade & investment in pharmaceutical, cement, steel, cotton, food and tourism (Zahir, 2022).

### **Sources of Soft Power in Pakistan**

Pakistan possesses significant potential to leverage soft power as a means of exerting influence at both regional and global scales. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif established the 'Islamabad Policy Research Institute' in 1999, to address the dissemination of propaganda against Pakistan (Rahman, 2014). The additional resources encompass various aspects such as art, media, languages, folk music, education, tourism, Sufi music, women empowerment, cultural diplomacy, sports diplomacy, cultural heritage, law enforcement, trade and investment, science and technology, religious tourism, cyberspace, film and entertainment, foreign aid and development, philanthropy, and humanitarian assistance.

### **Branding Pakistan**

Branding does not solely encompass conventional advertising methods and logo design; rather, it involves the development of distinct and high-quality attributes that establish a lasting impression in the customer's psyche. The sentiments and needs of customers are also duly acknowledged and valued. Consequently, the consumer is drawn to the aforementioned product. In the contemporary age of rapid media and efficient communication, it has become imperative for nations to engage in the process of branding themselves. Nation branding has been found to have a positive impact on foreign investment, job creation, business expansion, and overall improvement in the standard of life. Consequently, this has led to an increased sense of national pride. Ultimately, it mitigates the image of the nation.

The phenomenon of globalisation has engendered a competitive environment among states, as they strive to secure access to global markets. To attract international attention, to get 'Foreign Direct Investment' and diplomatic assistance in international forums; the Pakistani government must implement a national branding strategy. The aforementioned tools can be utilized to brand Pakistan. The presence of political stability and the implementation of credible and consistent economic policies might serve as advantageous factors in attracting foreign investment. The elements that can be

advantageous in attracting foreign investment include the availability of skilled and cost-effective labour, the establishment of Special Economic Zones, tax relief measures, the presence of a liberal economic environment, reductions in tariffs, improved market access, and enhanced security measures. The economically robust nation has a vested interest in attracting international investors, as their presence contributes to cultivating a positive perception of the country. The 'Dubai Expo 2020' was launched by the government of the United Arab Emirates in October 2021, attracting the participation of individuals from diverse backgrounds such as the general public, business professionals, traders, investors, and government officials hailing from 192 nations. Pakistan was extended an invitation as well. Over one hundred nations have showcased their merchandise and concurrently displayed their cultural and artistic expressions via exhibitions, intending to attract potential investors. This branding approach entails the United Arab Emirates (UAE) not only offering possibilities to other nations but also cultivating a positive perception as a desirable destination. Pakistan participated in the Expo to showcase itself as a land of opportunities.

The Pakistani government has implemented several measures aimed at enhancing the perception of Pakistan, one of which is the establishment of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan. This organization assists Pakistani exporters in showcasing their products and services in international markets. In the year 2020, the foreign office of Pakistan organized a workshop to enhance the diplomatic abilities of its ambassadors. The individuals were requested to fulfil the role of not just ambassadors, but also brand ambassadors, representing their nation and its products. Marketing goods and improving Pakistan's international reputation are their two main tasks. To help them reach their goals, they were given objectives. Prominent overseas social media influencers and vloggers were also invited to promote Pakistan and its tourist destinations.

### **The Cultural and Religious Association of Pakistan**

The Indus and Gandhara civilizations have been estimated to have originated approximately 5000 and 3000 years ago, respectively. These civilizations are considered to be among the most ancient in the world. The temples, residences, architectural structures, and material possessions associated with Gandhara art are regarded as remarkable marvels of the world. Nevertheless, these creations stand as a testament to the artistic skills of their makers. Taxila, a city located in the Punjab region, exhibits significant markers of the illustrious Gandhara cultivation. The depictions of Buddha are rendered on various surfaces such as walls, mountains, and stones, exemplifying exceptional artistic craftsmanship. These revered Buddhist temples can only be found here in the entire world (Rajput, 2018).

In addition to the Persians, ancient India had invasions from various other groups, including the Aryans, Greeks, Arabs, Afghans, and Mughals. The enduring presence of their footsteps may be observed in contemporary Pakistan in several aspects such as architecture, cuisine, infrastructure, religion, culture, and tradition. The cultural heritage of Pakistan has the potential to serve as a valuable asset in initiating cultural diplomacy with several regions, including Arab nations, Afghanistan, Iran, Greece, Central Asian states, and Turkey etc. In contemporary society, culture and religion have emerged as key factors in fostering healthy interpersonal bonds. Pakistan shares certain similarities with its neighbouring countries in the region. Taxila, Harappa Mohinjodaro, G.T Road, Noor Mahal, Shahi Qila, Badshahi Mosque, and other notable sites are examples of culturally significant locations in Pakistan. These sites



show the cultural and religious linkages with these regional countries. Six cultural sites have been designated as part of UNESCO's World Heritage list (UNESCO, n.d.).

### **Religious Tourism**

Numerous religious sites affiliated with Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism are present in Pakistan. There are Buddhist and Hindu temples dating back thousands of years. By undertaking the renovation and expansion of infrastructure for these temples, Pakistan has the potential to enhance its global reputation and promote social cohesion within its population. Societal growth and advancement are contingent upon the acceptance and tolerance of diverse religious beliefs, castes, and creeds. Pakistan is an emerging economy that necessitates the establishment of conditions conducive to peace, security, and equitable treatment for all individuals. Pakistan has the potential to emerge as a prominent destination for various religious communities.

Pakistan is currently engaged in efforts to promote religious tourism as a means of attracting international visitors. It is home to two renowned and sacred sites of the Sikh faith. The Gurdwara Janam Asthan and Gurdwara Darbar Sahib serve as the respective sites of birth and demise for Baba Guru Nanak. He is regarded as the founder of the Sikh faith and is well-liked by both Muslims and Hindus in the Subcontinent. A significant number of Sikh pilgrims travel to Nankana Sahib, a city located in the Punjab, to visit Gurdwara Janam Asthan. The Pakistani government offers enhanced security measures and dedicated amenities to Sikh tourists to visit their sacred sites.

The Kartarpur Corridor, also known as the Visa-free access for Indians, is a significant holy place in the Sikh religion. It provides an opportunity for Sikh followers to visit and engage in prayer at the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, located in District Narowal near the Indian border (Sevea, 2018). Pakistan will become a courteous, accepting country that honours the feelings of its religious minority as millions of Sikhs come there. Sikhs originating from India, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia are granted convenient access to visa services. The inauguration of the Kartarpur Corridor on November 9, 2019, marked a significant endeavour undertaken by Prime Minister Imran Khan. A large number of international delegates and diplomats were extended invitations to attend the inaugural summit. This action was viewed as a sign of Pakistani society's tolerance for minority groups (Gilani & Talib, 2020).

There are other tourist sites catering to Hindus and Buddhists that are now undergoing development and implementing measures to accommodate international tourists. Pakistan recently extended an invitation to Buddhist monks and esteemed preachers, to visit the country and witness its temples. Foreign tourists are bound to be drawn to Pakistan when the country's law and order situation improves.

### **Cultural Exchange Programs**

People-to-people engagements through theatre, dramas, art and movies come under this. Besides this educational and tourism opportunities also create cultural exchange in which the people understand the values of other countries. As a result of this, they come close to each other. Pakistan needs to strengthen these programs in which people from the region make close to the Pakistani society and culture. Pakistan is a nation characterised by its diverse population, encompassing various ethnicities, cultures, and linguistic groups. There is a presence of nearly 601 distinct languages spoken in Pakistan. Several languages, such as Punjabi, Urdu, English, Pashto, and

Persian, are spoken in nations other than their places of origin. Furthermore, these languages are also spoken in neighbouring nations within the region. It is imperative for the government to actively endorse and support the proliferation of literature, art, films, and cinema in other languages as a means to foster a shared cultural experience and establish connections between different civilizations. By implementing this approach, the soft image of Pakistan can be enhanced. The individual proficient in these languages will acquire knowledge about Pakistan through the mediums of literature, art, and cinema.

### **Entertainment Industry**

During a certain period, the Pakistani film industry was producing over one hundred films annually. A significant number of artists from Nepal and Bangladesh were actively engaged in artistic and cinematography, leading to a flowering of the arts and film industry. However, for the past three decades, the film industry has been confronted with a dilemma. The medium of film and dramas has the potential to project a positive image of Pakistan within the region, similar to Bollywood, which has been successful in promoting a positive image of India. Pakistani dramas garner significant viewership and are predominantly accessed on the YouTube platform from all over the world. However, there is a need for enhancement in the quality of content to further engage a larger audience on OTT platforms.

### **Educational Diplomacy**

Pakistani students frequently pursue higher education opportunities overseas through various programmes offered by foreign governments. These students engage in the pursuit of knowledge and reside in foreign nations, thereby absorbing the cultural and institutional influences prevalent in their surroundings. Most of them were motivated by their culture and political system when they returned home. The nations in which they studied have these soft power advantages. If education meets international standards, then it can become a significant source of soft power for Pakistan.

Every year, Allama Iqbal Scholarships are provided to students from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The scope of this scholarship programme can be expanded to encompass additional countries in the region, with a focus on arts, science, and technology disciplines. Pakistan is home to several esteemed institutions in the field of health sciences, such as Agha Khan University, University of Health Sciences, Dow Medical University, and King Edward Medical University etc. There should be a specified quota for the students of regional nations to promote research, variety and quality in the universities.

### **Tourism**

Pakistan offers an extensive range of tourist attractions, including notable places such as the world's second tallest peak, K2, as well as deserts, sea shores, rivers, lakes, snow-covered regions, glaciers, and lush green landscapes. Tourists can derive enjoyment from their visit to these locations while adhering to a constrained budget. Pakistan has the potential to enhance regional connectivity and foster stronger relationships with neighbouring countries by implementing visa-free access policies. This initiative will facilitate the establishment of stronger bonds between the people of Pakistan and the regional nations. The utilization of electronic and social media platforms can serve as effective tools to attract tourists from international destinations

to Pakistan. In addition to its soft power implications, the tourist industry in Pakistan has the potential to generate a substantial number of employment opportunities, hence facilitating the country's progress. In the past, individuals from the Arabian countries would frequently visit Pakistan on vacation. However, presently, it is primarily members of royal families that visit for hunting bustards. Encouraging tourism requires improving the state of law and order.

### **Regional Connectivity and China**

Pakistan is a gateway to South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East. The region possesses deep sea ports that provide convenient connectivity to landlocked nations in Central Asia and China via the Indian Ocean. In 2014, Pakistan entered into an agreement known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which forms an integral component of the broader Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China aims to enhance its infrastructure by constructing new roadways and networks that facilitate efficient and diversified commerce routes, as well as the transportation of energy resources to support its industrial sector.

Pakistan's burgeoning population and constrained resources necessitate economic growth. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) aims to enhance the country's road infrastructure, communication networks, energy sector, and research initiatives. Pakistan also aims to establish transport links, such as motorways and roads, connecting Gawadar Port to countries in Central Asia. The nation in question shares an extensive border with Iran; nonetheless, the levels of trade, tourism, and interpersonal interactions between the two countries are notably limited. Pakistan has the potential to access European markets for exporting its commodities at reduced expenses by utilizing the transit routes provided by Iran and Turkey. This program aims to enhance the economy by generating revenue through the imposition of toll charges and other sources of income derived from the ports. The projects associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are expected to generate employment and investment prospects for a significant number of Pakistanis.

### **Commerce and Investment**

Commerce not only generates financial gain but also contributes to the soft image of the country in which it is carried out. Pakistani enterprises possess the capability to engage in global competition. Notable examples include Descon, Interloop, Brighto Paints, Mitchell's Foods, Omore, Engro Foods, Shan Foods, National Foods, K&N's, United Bank Limited, and Habib Bank Limited. These Pakistani brands have established their presence in many foreign markets such as the UAE, KSA, UK, USA, France, and others. Encouraging these corporations to make investments in the regional countries would strengthen the stakes of Pakistan. Through rebranding and implementing innovative strategies, these entities can expand their market reach to include additional global marketplaces.

### **Conclusion**

The utilisation of hard power and alignment with a global superpower has had the effect of impeding Pakistan's regional connectivity and development, ultimately leading to its diplomatic isolation. Pakistan possesses significant potential in the realm of soft power, which can be employed to foster robust relationships with neighbouring countries in the region. Its important values and culture date back thousands of years, and they are connected to this region. India has a hostile attitude towards Pakistan,

which appears to hold a dominant position in the regional organisation and political landscape. The impact of Indian influence on neighbouring countries poses significant concerns for Pakistan. The regional countries may be reached alone through the establishment of robust bilateral connections and the strategic utilisation of the aforementioned soft power tools which are explained above.

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