**Latent soft power**

BY R A VA L E M O H Y D I N | 10/6/2019

|  |
| --- |
| WHILE power is the capacity to direct the behaviour of others through any means necessary, `soft power`, a term first coined by Joseph Nye in 1990, is essentially power without the use of coercion or force. When it comes to countries` sof t power, Nye believed that it `rests primarily on three resources: its culture in places where it is attractive to others; its political value when it lives up to them at home and abroad; and its foreign politics when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority`.  Soft power can translate into effective public diplomacy ie the process whereby a country seeks to build trust and understanding by engaging with a broader foreign public beyond governmental relations.  Pakistan appears to have very little soft power globally, which is usually achieved through public diplomacy efforts. This is due to a variety of reasons, disregarding the political imbroglios the country has found itself in over the years, including a lack of a clear national brand and missing market-able public diplomacy assets. This is despite the existence of sizeable Pakistani diasporas, the world`s lingua franca being Pakistan`s `official` language and a population of over 200 million diverse people from a plethora of cultures all really potent ingredients for a powerful punch of sof t power.  Pakistan has been lacking a national brand, and perhaps this is partly resulting from the fact that it is a diverse lot of ethnicities brought together as Muslims. While being Muslim is undoubtedly an important identity, what is the Pakistan brand? An effective national brand is built on national values. National leaders set those values, and these priorities inform how the country is perceived abroad. Other Muslim countries are working hard to develop a national brand in addition to their religion.  A good example is Turkey`s leadership consistently valuing the country`s Ottoman heritage and beheving in the efhcacy of humanitarian diplomacy. That has led to the development of public diplomacy products and programmes such as the internationally popular drama series Diliris: Ertugrul and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, Turkey`s official development assistance agency operating in 150-plus countries. Research studies have shown improving perceptions of the country in key regions.  Unfortunately for Pakistan, the country`s national values were dictated by changing political or military leadership every few years. For Gen Zia, Pakistan`s national values were adherent to an ultraconservative and version of Islam. During Gen Musharraf`s tenure, Top 40 tunes blaredthrough car radios. For the `socialist` prime minister Bhutto, rapid nationalisation was the way to go, while the other prime minister Bhutto introduced full-fledged liberalisation in the country in 1988. For prime minister Sharif, Basant was a no-no, and even though there were legitimate safety concerns, no effort was made to preserve Pakistan`s cultural wealth.  All these national values got jumbled up, and so did Pakistan`s brand. No public diplomacy products or programmes were developed or promoted in the post-Cold War period, when other countries realised the importance of generating global influence through sof t power.  With Prime Minister Imran Khan, Pakistan is now witnessing another set of national values as he set Pakistan`s agenda at the 2019 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It is a good opportunity for Pakistan to finally find its Goldilocks zone, its own distinctive voice. Prime Minister Khan highlighted the significant human rights violations in occupied Kashmir; Pakistan`s non-recognition of Israel until Palestine gets its due rights; itsmindfulness of climate change; and its determined action against hate speech in collaboration with other Muslim countries.  Pakistan has the opportunity to develop its brand on the foundation of these displayed values: humani-tarianism,justice,environmentalism,modernity, and inclusivity. These national values can guide the focused development, coordination and promotion of relevant public diplomacy products and programmes for foreign audiences, bringing Pakistan`s values and priorities closer to them, leading to greater influence worldwide.  Yes, Pakistan has wondrous mountains in the north, its Sufi shrines shimmer at night and the country has a unique musical talent on display every new season of Coke Studio or Nescafe Basement. Why are multinationals smart enough to profit from Pakistan`s latent soft power, while the country itself faces international scepticism? Until Pakistantransformsitintopublic diplomacy products and programmes that effectively convey its values, the country`s influence will remain stunted. Prime Minister Khan`s UNGA performance was a good start, but the message has to continue uninterrupted for it to truly create positive impact.  The writer works at TRT World Research Centre in Istanbul.  Twitter: @Ravale\_Mohydin |