

# The Global Village

*Kishore Mahbubani*

**Q**UIETLY, without much fanfare, humanity passed a significant milestone. Today, there are more phones than people. This does not mean every human being has a phone. Some have two or three. In 1990, only 11 million people had cell phones. In 2011, the number of cell phones worldwide was 5.6 billion, while the number of landline phones stood at 1.32 billion—as the global population approached 7 billion. And we can call almost any part of the world at almost no cost through Internet services such as Skype. This level of teledensity means that people have become interconnected at a level never seen before in history.

Technology is generating global convergence. This global explosion of cell phones, and soon of smartphones, will take the Internet, and the information it conveys, to all corners of the globe. A small solar-powered battery and a tiny computer have already done this for remote African and Indian villages. This “big bang” of information—and education as well—is also improving human lives. As more people learned about vaccinations, the proportion of the world’s infants vaccinated against diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus—via the DPT shot—climbed from one-fifth to nearly four-fifths between 1970 and

2006. And other ideas that save lives—such as washing one’s hands, or not defecating in the fields one eats from—have made their way around the world and are increasingly accepted (Kenny, 2011). Connectivity saves lives.

Technology also allows people to cross borders in greater numbers. In 1950, barely 25 million people traveled internationally; by 2020, that figure is expected to reach 1.6 billion. In short, 1 in 5 inhabitants of Planet Earth will cross an international boundary—a previously unthinkable level of connection.

Yet technology is only one of the forces driving this deep interconnectivity. Over time, we have also created a single global economy. Hence, when the tiny Greek economy threatens to fail, the whole world trembles—this Greek domino can now bring down dominoes as large as the U.S. and Chinese economies. Stock markets around the world rise and fall in unison when a major global event erupts. And global supply chains mean that when one country is hit by a natural disaster, factories across the ocean suffer consequences too. We live in one economic world.

Global warming also drives home the message of a shrinking world. Almost daily we see evidence, such as the Arctic thaw and freak weather patterns, that climate

# has Arrived

Interconnectivity is growing by leaps and bounds

change is real. No single nation can save the world from global warming. Similarly, when one traveler with flu boards a plane, thousands of people round the world can be quickly infected with the disease. The global village must come together in a mighty effort to save it, which calls for a new global ethic to remind us that the lives of 7 billion people are now deeply entwined. The Oxford philosopher David Rodin argues that “we are ‘pushed’ toward a global ethic by the need to address urgent issues that are increasingly global in nature” (Rodin, 2012). I agree.

Paradoxically, technology, a material force, is also driving emotional connectivity across frontiers. Hence, when 33 Chilean miners were trapped underground for 69 days, the whole world prayed for them. And a Ugandan warlord, Joseph Kony, accused of killing and maiming thousands for decades, was suddenly isolated and hamstrung when a video about him went viral, becoming the most viewed video of all time. In only six days, it received more than 100 million views, mostly on YouTube (Aguilar, 2012). A resolution against Kony introduced in the U.S. Senate in March 2012 had 46 co-sponsors. One of them, Senator Lindsey Graham, said, “When you get 100 million Americans looking at something, you will get our attention” (Wong, 2012).

With global interconnectivity growing by leaps and bounds, the spread of information and ideas means our moral compasses will expand beyond national borders. It is only a matter of time before all of us look beyond the horizon and become citizens of both our own country and of our planet. The world will be a better place when we unite to strengthen our global village. ■

*Kishore Mahbubani is Dean of the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy and author of the forthcoming book The Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World.*

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