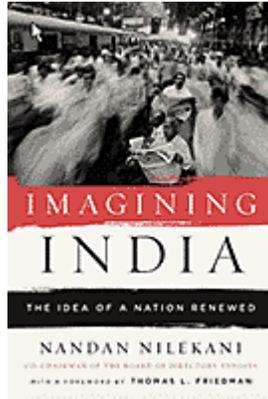


A cofounder of Infosys, India's largest global IT player, Nandan Nilekani has actively participated in the country's rise over the last fifteen years. That rise required dramatic transitions in a country that used to be strongly socialist, highly bureaucratic and stubbornly averse to change. Nevertheless, today's India still presents high hurdles to those trying to set up a business, register property, or enforce a contract. Its infrastructure, in spite of some improvements, is still inept and most levels of the Indian government remain averse to reform and innovation.



Imagining India is primarily about ideas: the ideas that held India back, the ideas that allowed it to forge ahead, and the ideas the country has yet to embrace. Nilekani argues that at the heart of the new India is a transformation of its self-image: the country's tremendous population growth, once seen as a burden, is now recognized as a boon, a 'demographic dividend' that results from having one of the youngest populations in a graying world. Among other such shifts are the country's embrace of the English language, once rejected as a colonial relict, or the openness to technology that shapes India's new identity. Nevertheless, the author assesses India's contemporary problems with great candor. He flags issues

such as an education system that leaves 40% of the population illiterate, unreliable water, electric power, or transportation systems, and a labyrinth of disconnected states that hold on to different taxes, rules and regulations.

The most controversial part of *Imagining India* is Nilekani's discussion of ideas that he believes India still needs to embrace. For instance, he calls for the political class to become less ideological and more business-friendly, to reform education and improve labor, healthcare and pension systems. For each, the author outlines large-scale reforms. The reward for these transformations, Nilekani argues, is to fulfill the promise his young, impatient, vital and awake country holds.

Some critics view Nilekani's vision as too IT-centric and business-biased. Others argue that his views of the 'demographic dividend', and of information technology as a remedy for the country's dismal infrastructure, are out of touch with the realities of today's India, which continues to struggle with the pressures on education systems, urban expansion, environmental pollution, and many other areas that result from the country's rapid population growth. While there may be some truth to all of these concerns, the author's observations and suggestions, as a concerned Indian and as an outsider to the country's political system, provide a fresh perspective and are undeniably worth a closer look. If you care about the future of India, you should read this book.

Leadership Crossroads™ 10865-B Hazelhurst Dr. #11793, Houston, TX 77043
469-522-3389

info@leadershipcrossroads.com www.leadershipcrossroads.com

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Lothar Katz is the founder of Leadership Crossroads. He has a wealth of experience in achieving productive cooperation across cultures and driving business success on a global scale.

A seasoned former executive of Fortune 500 company Texas Instruments, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world, including many parts of Asia. Mr. Katz is the author of "Negotiating International Business – The Negotiator's Reference Guide to 50 Countries Around the World".

