

INDIA-HONG KONG HEALTH DIPLOMACY IN NEED OF REFORMS

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Increasing number of Indians add value to enhance Hong Kong's tourism and also at times to strengthen academic ties and trade. India's relations with Hong Kong dates back to 1840s when Hong Kong became a British Colony after the treaty of Nanking as a result of the first opium war. Today diplomatic ties between Hong Kong and India have promoted growth in sectors of investment finance, education, culture, shipping and trade. Health diplomacy has continued to be side-lined and little has been understood by Hong Kong's immigration officers. Universities are now coming forward to pursue and strengthen gaps in public health and public policy between the two nations which is the way forward for global health.

Immigration officers in Hong Kong and India need to be educated with this regard and they need to be sensitized in this context. It is my observation that increasing Indians are being detained for interrogation by the Hong Kong immigration authorities and precious time is being wasted in purposeless questions. If the Hong Kong Government feels that such questions are imperative, I would like to call upon the External affairs ministries of two countries to suspend Visa on arrival and let regularized Visa procedure come into place before travel to respective destinations.

Consulate General of India was set up in 1951 in advance of China's assumption of sovereignty over

Hong Kong on 1st July, 1997. But given China's diplomatic priorities, Hong Kong should re-visit its own. Recent decades have witnessed growing economic interests for the two nations, given India's emergence into International markets for growth that is sky-rocketing.

In order to boost ties, the chief executive of Hong Kong, C Y Leung made an official visit to India in February, 2016 which was accompanied by a strong 40-member delegation to India. This high level visit should be showcased as a gesture of goodwill and it should be a roadway for immigration officers to stand enlightened and promote health diplomacy.

Global health has been springing surprises with its diverse interpretations. But one thing is clear that, rapid urbanization, climate change adaptation and International health requires to be addressed jointly. India and Hong Kong face common problems in health and we ought to cultivate international ties to forge the future we collectively believe in. While universities in Hong Kong and India have started to reach out to each other, it becomes obvious that individuals would also connect for professional dialogue which will make them friends for life.

Hong Kong has for more than 150 years been home to large Indian communities. The contribution of India to shape Hong Kong in way of a hub for economic finance cannot be denied. Members of the Indian community established well known institutions in Hong Kong like the Ruttonjee Hospital, the Star Ferry and the Hong Kong University. With over 45,000 Indians resident in Hong Kong and more than double that number visiting Hong Kong for tourism, trade, university engagements, it is that time of the day for Hong Kong- India diplomacy to re-visit health diplomacy. The two missions should not keep interrogating every alternate Indian visiting Hong Kong. And if they do, there should be a proper justification given.

The future of the two countries will continue to improve and the two nations can surely come closer. But reforms in immigration processes for those visiting for leisure and for academic engagements needs to be revisited and improvised upon.

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