Motivational Quotes

A dream is not that which you see while sleeping, it is something that does not let you sleep

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam
H-1B visa in the spotlight

- H-1B - non-immigrant U.S. for skilled workers - tech jobs.
- Indian IT firms have been among the top recipients of the 65,000 such visas made available annually via a lottery system.
- President Donald Trump, driven by his campaign promise of “Buy American, Hire American”.
- Shares in Indian IT majors took a nosedive last week when an unconfirmed draft executive order leaked to U.S. media houses appeared to call for reform of immigration rules for skilled foreign workers that would raise the salary eligibility for such visas to $130,000, reverse the extensions granted by the Obama administration to the Optional Practical Training programme for foreign graduates in the U.S., and institute a rigorous monitoring system for companies employing L-1 visa holders, intra-company transferees.
- At least two bills with bipartisan backing were introduced in the House of Representatives last month, both urging tightening of conditions for skilled-worker visas that are, in the government’s view, costing Americans jobs.
- Shadow of protectionism that it would cast on the bilateral relationship with New Delhi, this visa crackdown in the making raises troubling questions for the U.S. tech sector and the broader economy as well.
- Any significant hike in the minimum salary levels for the specialised jobs held by H-1B visa recipients will hit not only Indian IT firms but also the tech titans of Silicon Valley, including Microsoft, Google and Facebook-This will inflict pain on the U.S. economy.
- Indian firms have for years been the most rapidly growing investors in the U.S. economy.
- If IT companies within this group are impacted by onerous new restrictions, they would likely prefer to entirely offshore their operations to India-Ironically, that could lead to job losses for American workers.
- His administration would be wise to think through all the possible outcomes that could result from ham-fisted policies in the immigration space.
A season to repair relations

- The Chinese Ambassador to India, Luo Zhaohui, recently put forward some suggestions for improvement of bilateral ties between China and India. The suggestions are timely since relations between the two Asian giants have looked tired and worn in recent months.

- All pointers to a complex and tension:
  1) China’s obduracy on India’s Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) bid,
  2) Its incomprehensible stand on the listing of known terrorist-progenitor Masood Azhar under the U.N. Security Council’s 1267 Committee,
  3) The deployment of Chinese military and engineering assets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are riddled relationship.

Absence of trust

- On the CPEC, the Prime Minister himself, speaking at the Raisina Dialogue [Q-Theme] in New Delhi, implicitly criticised the Chinese actions saying, “Connectivity in itself cannot override or undermine the sovereignty of other nations.”

- Commentators have suggested that India’s Tibet policy is also being recalibrated, drawing conclusions from the Dalai Lama’s projected visit to Arunachal Pradesh and his being “seen at Rashtrapati Bhavan, sitting beside President Pranab Mukherjee”.

- As expected, the nationalist Chinese media condemned it.
Mr. Luo suggested a ‘friendship and cooperation treaty’ and a free trade agreement (FTA) to boost bilateral relations and joining of hands on China’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, and added that the time is ripe for both countries to reap some ‘early harvest’ outcomes (based on negotiations held so far) on the unresolved boundary question.

That the Ambassador chose to make these remarks at the newly-established Ji Xianlin Centre for India-China Studies at the University of Mumbai campus lent some symbolism to the occasion.

Could the Ambassador's statement be part of an effort within the Chinese establishment to review relations with neighbours like India, given the strategic uncertainties generated by the advent of Donald Trump’s administration in the U.S. and his unabashed negativity towards China?

Mr. Trump’s phone call with the Taiwanese President, Tsai Ing-wen, before he took office; his proclaimed intention to impose punitive tariffs on Chinese goods; and the new U.S. Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson’s thinly disguised threats against China’s building of artificial islands in the disputed areas in the South China Sea have all generated concern in Beijing.

Sectors of the boundary, like Sikkim and the middle sector (Uttarakhand/Himachal Pradesh), are by and large free of the disputes that one sees in the western (Jammu and Kashmir) and eastern (Arunachal Pradesh) sectors.

But ‘solutions’ that segment the border instead of ensuring an overall comprehensive settlement of the boundary may be difficult to accept, especially for India.
Devil in the detail

- A treaty of friendship and cooperation between the two countries recalls the 1954 “Panchsheel” Agreement which essentially tied up the status of Tibet but also outlined the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence — principles that became empty words over the ensuing years as the relationship slid into conflict and then took years to revive.

- The 1993 and 1996 agreements on peace and tranquility and confidence building in the India-China border areas reiterated the five principles and also spoke of the non-use of force and the concept of mutual and equal security.

- As for trade and economic relations, Mr. Luo’s idea of an FTA is no doubt forward looking.

- Trade between India and China has grown to an annual volume of $70 billion (2015-16).

- India has made a strong pitch for Chinese investments under Make in India in infrastructure development, solar energy and smart cities.

- Recent reports, however, also suggest security hurdles faced by Chinese firms seeking to invest in India.

- An FTA that is goods-centred will obviously not benefit India given the huge trade in goods imbalance that favours China.

- An FTA that is comprehensive
  - 1)- covering goods and services,
  - 2)-cross-border investment,
  - 3)-R&D, standards and
  - 4)- dispute resolution would be worth exploring.

- India’s own reaction to China’s OBOR has been hedging and tentative, mainly because of the CPEC through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

- At the same time, India is a part of the frontline membership of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) [Q-HQ+ESTB] that is bolstering OBOR.
Connectivity, connectivity, connectivity

- Chinese approach, and with reference to OBOR, explore the development of connectivity between Tibet and India, especially through the Sikkim sector into Bengal. The old route between Lhasa and Kolkata via Nathu La was the most easily traversed route.
- This is a road that provided for the transport of goods and services between Tibet and the outside world through India.
- Nathu La is already the crossing point for border trade between India and the Tibet Autonomous Region.
- The two countries have a common interest in curbing religious radicalism and terrorism- Kashmir and Xinjiang, both contiguous neighbours, have similar challenges posed by terrorism and separatist movements.

New thinking necessary

- India-China relations can definitely do with some new thinking and new ideas, and from that point of view, the Chinese Ambassador has done well to articulate his outlook, however modest, on how more bilateral cooperation can be promoted.
- It is entirely in the self-interest of each country to ensure this.
- 1) Competitive coexistence, with a clear delineation of areas - how to manage them,
- 2) the promotion of business and people centred connectivity,
- 3) and mutual confidence-building with tension-reduction measures cannot do any harm.
- The border problem, by virtue of its complexity and size, will take its time to resolve.
- China as the larger neighbour must take the initiative to ensure that this trend is halted- Its approach on NSG, Masood Azhar, the activities in PoK, to name a few, have cast long shadows on the relationship.
- China cannot expect India not to pursue her legitimate interests in ensuring the security of its periphery, and to promote ties with countries like the U.S. and Japan and ASEAN partners in the Indo-Asia Pacific.
- India and China that is aimed at preserving and promoting good contact, communication and connectivity in diverse spheres as also he peace on our shared borders of the last few decades.
Monumental mistakes

- Without architecture, we cannot remember.”— John Ruskin,
- When the British occupied Shahjahanabad (Old Delhi), they remodelled the city and the Mughal Red Fort to suit their convenience.
- Around 80% of the buildings inside the Red Fort were demolished to make way for military barracks. Mansions and havelis were brought down to make way for broader, new roads so that the British had easy access for defence purposes, in case the people decided to ‘rebel’ against them again.
- Perhaps everything would have got demolished but for a horrified Charles Canning who tried to preserve our heritage -The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was formed in 1861 by a statute passed into law by Canning, with Alexander Cunningham as its first Archaeological Surveyor, to excavate and conserve India’s ancient built heritage.

Preserving heritage

- In 1904, a Cambridge classics scholar, who was the Director General of ASI, formulated the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 (modified on September 1, 1949)
- The aim of the Act was to preserve monuments as archaeological ruin on an “as is where is” basis
- John Marshall also drew up a conservation manual in 1922- It was one of the most comprehensive documents written on conservation at that time.
- The job of the ASI, under the [Q-Ministry +HQ -?] is to protect the cultural heritage of our nation.
The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010 was passed with provisions to protect ancient monuments and antiquities and regulate all construction activity around them.

It specified a ‘prohibited area’, which meant that no construction activity (erection or a building, including any addition or extension thereto either vertically or horizontally) could take place within 100 m in all directions of a monument.

However, sometime in the past century, people from neighbouring villages occupied this place.

Not only will the proposed elevated road hide the tomb’s gateway but it will also damage the structure during construction, and later because - within the 100 m prohibited zone.

Do development and our future have to be at the cost of our past?
Looking back to look forward

- January 30, **Martyrs’ Day, [Q-World Day-?]** is gradually losing significance just like some of the other days related to our freedom struggle.
- It created not only shock and sorrow but also fear about India’s future, her civilisation and ethic, and her fame for a non-violent freedom struggle.
- Communal hatred and violence fuelled by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, powerful organisations whose anti-Muslim and anti-Gandhi stand- These groups hated Gandhi’s concern and support for Muslims.
- It is time now for India not to remember this day only as Martyrs’ Day but as a day to reflect on the spirit of the freedom movement.
- There should be much more discussion, public meetings, a kind of eventful day that enables the new generation to recall what was the politics
- Just as we have endless panels on the bickering by political parties or the fallibility of gigantic corporates- we should have discussions on January 30 invoking the history of the freedom struggle.
- A two-minute silence on the day and naming the road on which Birla House is located Tees January Marg are not enough.
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It was one of the most comprehensive documents written on conservation at that time. The job of the ASI, under the Ministry of Culture, is to protect the cultural heritage of our nation.

The Raisina Dialogue is an annual conference held in New Delhi, envisioned to be India's flagship conference of geopolitics and geo-economics. The conference, organized like the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, is held jointly by Ministry of External Affairs, India and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), an independent think tank based in India. Its inaugural session was held from March 1 through 3rd in 2016.

The conference name comes from Raisina Hill, the elevation in New Delhi, which is the location of both the Government of India as well as the presidential palace of India, Rashtrapati Bhavan, which inspired the design of the conference symbol.

Second edition of Raisina Dialogue was held from January 19-21, 2017, with the theme of "The New Normal: Multilateralism with Multi-Polarity".

It was inaugurated by current PM Narendra Modi, with 69 nations participating. It was conducted in the shadows World Economic Forum 2017 in Davos, where Chinese president Xi Jinping also spoke. Notable was the absence of head of states of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

World Leprosy Day is observed internationally on January 30 or its nearest Sunday to increase the public awareness of the Leprosy or Hansen's Disease.

This day was chosen in commemoration of the death of Gandhi, the leader of India who understood the importance of leprosy. Leprosy is one of the oldest recorded diseases in the world.

It is an infectious chronic disease that targets the nervous system, especially the nerves in the cooler parts of the body - the hands, feet, and face.