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India takes U-turn on visa to Uyghur 'terrorist'

BY GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN on APRIL 26, 2016 in ASIA TIMES NEWS & FEATURES, CHINA, INDIA

So why did Indian cancel visa to Dolkun Isa who is viewed by China as a terrorist? Was it due to the strongarm neighbor's pressure or the wide media coverage about his visit? Or was it a belated message to China by India for blocking its move to sanction Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar at the UN? India says the electronic tourist visa Isa had applied for and received was invalid for addressing public meetings in India. The answer seems logically convincing

New Delhi made a wise move on April 25 by canceling an e-visa it had earlier granted to Uyghur activist, Dolkun Isa. Isa had plans to address a conference of Chinese dissidents in Dharamsala, the administrative headquarters of the Tibetan spiritual leader, Dalai Lama, in the northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

Despite differences with New Delhi, Beijing has never encouraged separatist forces in troubled states in India like Kashmir or Nagaland. China has also never allowed visits by separatist leaders from India. So India knew that if it grants visa to people like Isa, China too can allow visits by anti-India leaders.



Dolkun Isa

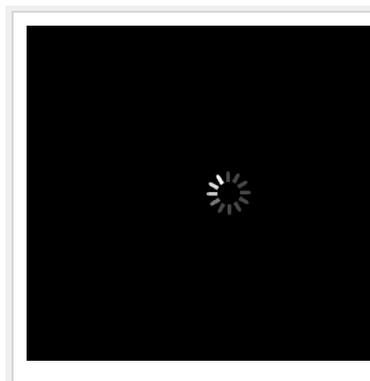
New Delhi's flip-flop drew criticism from the Opposition which said India committed another big blunder by bowing to China's pressure.

Srikanth Kondapalli, professor of Chinese Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, disagreed. He said the granting of visa and its subsequent cancellation was more about "sending a message across to China without losing any ground."

"India has not lost anything," Kondapalli told *Hindustan Times*.

It was not a "climb-down" as seen by many. If India had allowed Isa to visit Dharamsala, the consequences for China's national security policy would have been "shattering" with other countries emulating India, he said.

The issuance of visa to Isa angered Beijing because the conference in Dharamsala set to begin on April 28 under the auspices of the US will see Uyghurs — an ethnic Chinese minority who has had an uneasy relationship with the majority since long — and other exiled Chinese



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dissidents discussing democratic transformation in China.

Peeved over New Delhi's welcoming attitude toward Isa, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying said: "What I want to point out is that Isa is a terrorist on red notice of the Interpol and Chinese police. Bringing him to justice is the due obligation of relevant countries."

The relationship between India and China has in the best of times been tenuous and fraught with suspicion, and there has been ever so often some incident or the other which kept alive the tension between the world's two most populous nations, each vying with the other to become an economic giant and political superpower.

Recently, China blocked a move by India at the United Nations to label the Jaish-e-Mohammed chief, Masood Azhar, an international terrorist. Azhar, a Pakistani national, is guilty of masterminding the 2001 attack on Indian Parliament that could have wiped out much of the country's top leadership, and which brought India and Pakistan to the brink of a full-scale war.

For a long time, Beijing has been trying to arrest Uyghur leaders like Isa and Rebiya Kadeer and vehemently opposing the idea any country hosting them. In 2009, India had refused to host Kadeer.

Isa has been accused of organizing terrorist activities in the Muslim-majority Xinjiang region — which is home to Uyghurs, one of China's 55 minority communities. He has also been charged with terror attacks in Toksu (Xinjiang) in the 1990s. In 1997, he got an asylum in Germany where he has been living since then.

The mass riots in 1999 in Xinjiang killed nearly 200 people. In 2009, Isa was not allowed to enter South Korea since he was on a "terror watch list".

The Dalai Lama will attend the Dharamsala conference which is being organized by a pro-democracy group headed by Yang Jianli who was one of the student protesters at Tiananmen Square in 1989.

According to a Chinese resident who has been living in Kolkata for decades and who did not wish to be named, "that India is all set to host leaders who are seen as anti-China shows things between the two Asian giants are not all hunky-dory."

New Delhi has been unhappy with China after the Masood Azhar incident in the UN. In a press note, it said Beijing must "shed its double standards" and stop being "selective" when it came to terrorism.

During the past few days, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Defence Minister Manohar Parikkar and National Security Advisor Ajit K Doval have spoken to their respective Chinese counterparts about the Azhar incident.

Beijing has been somewhat dismissive about their concerns by saying it did not veto the move but only kept the issue on "technical hold".

In recent years, India has been upping Chinese ante. In November 2011, it refused to prevent the Dalai Lama from speaking at a Buddhism conference. This angered Beijing so much that it cancelled the border talks with New Delhi.

India-China irritants have remained since the fateful 1962 border war when Chinese troops entered India and illegally occupied a small area in Jammu and Kashmir called Aksai Chin. On the other hand, even as India has been urging China to withdraw from Aksai Chin, Beijing has been making a claim over India's eastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

Although several thousand Chinese — who were dentists, dry-cleaners, shoe-makers and restaurateurs — left India after societal hostility following the 1962 border war, things have become quite normal at the people-to-people level today.

The Indian executive editor of *China Daily*, Ravi, once told me that the "Chinese as a people are kind and polite to Indians".

This is also vouched by a young businessman, Lalith Jain, who goes to China at least three or four times in a year.

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Last year, I went to China twice on the invitation of the government — to Beijing and to Fuzhou — to cover the films festivals there, and I found my hosts warm and cordial. There is a particular incident I wish to share with readers.

Once I walked to the Forbidden City, which was just next to my hotel in Beijing. I had not carried my passport, and the standard rule is that one can enter the City only after the identity papers have been examined. When I apologetically told the guard at the gate that I was not carrying my passport and that I could go back to my hotel and get it, he smiled and waved me in when he knew that I was from India.

Well, politics may be a different ball game.

Gautaman Bhaskaran is an author, commentator and movie critic, who has worked with The Statesman in Kolkata and The Hindu in Chennai for 35 years. He now writes for the Hindustan Times, the Gulf Times and Seoul Times.

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Alex Wijaya · 8 minutes ago

India has not lost anything? Umm..how about face? It is really not up to India to determine how much face it has lost. When others laugh at you, you know you have lost face, no matter how you want to twist the situation.

Anyway, the blunder isn't withdrawing the visa, but inviting the terrorist to india in the first place. Withdrawing the visa was actually a wise decision, albeit an embarrassing and bitter one, a price to pay when one made the wrong choice in the first place. India after all wouldn't want China to host indian separatists (which india has plenty) on Chinese soil.

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