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New consulate to strengthen Indo-US ties

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The ancient Sanskrit playwright Bhâsa wrote the following line in Swapna-vasavadatta: *Kalakramen jagataha parivartamana:* "Just as the cycle of life turns, the world experiences constant change." The new US Consulate General in north Mumbai's Bandra-Kurla Complex symbolizes the positive changes in the US-India partnership.

Our new home will allow us to deepen that partnership through better visa processing, increased commercial promotion, and an expansion of our people-to-people linkages.

Serving US citizens and processing visas are the consulate's core responsibilities. While our old home at Lincoln House is beautiful, we found it difficult to efficiently serve our 2,00,000 annual visa applicants from the kitchen space of a 1930's-era palace. Our new facility has four times as many interview windows and will allow us to accommodate the 10-15% annual increase in applications we are expecting over the coming years. We will be better able to serve Indian tourists, students, and businesspeople who want to travel to the US, as well as those seeking to emigrate. We can also better serve the Americans who come to India.

We also seek to expand business linkages between our two countries. Our new consulate allows us to bring our Foreign Commercial Service, Foreign Agricultural Service, and economic sections under one roof. We will promote increased export of US goods and services to India by assisting Indian companies identify American uppliers. We will promote Indian foreign direct investment in the US. Tens of thousands of Americans proudly work for Indian companies, just as Indians proudly work for American firms. We want the numbers to grow. As the geographic centre of Mumbai moves northward, so must we. We will continue our American Center programs, including film screenings, children's events, cultural performances and media events – from BKC, and in partnership with other venues throughout Mumbai and

The consulate at BKC

our broader consular district (including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Goa). Our new library is a bright space for all visitors, and will feature the latest gizmos such as iPads and e-books. We are also looking for new ways to use social media to digitally connect with young Indians.

Many Mumbaikars have shared with me their positive memories of Lincoln House and the American Center. Some remembered getting their first US visa in the 1950s; others how they used to visit the American Center to read the latest news about the US. Our Facebook fans said farewells to the American Library as it departed Churchgate. We are looking forward to creating new memories of the US Consulate General at BKC over the coming years. Please visit.

(Peter Haas is the US Consul General)