

TRANSCRIPT OF ADDRESS BY AMBASSADOR SIBI GEORGE TO INDIAN COMMUNITY GROUPS IN KUWAIT, DEC 18, 2020

My fellow citizens of India in Kuwait, Dear Children present here, Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening.

Let me begin my address today by thanking His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince, for hosting the large Indian community in Kuwait.

I also thank the Government of the State of Kuwait and Kuwaiti friends of India for their efforts and support in strengthening the bilateral relations between our two friendly countries. I congratulate the leadership and the people of the State of Kuwait for a very successful elections to the National Assembly, despite the challenges posed by the Covid 19 pandemic situation. I had the honor of witnessing the opening session of the National Assembly on December 15. I congratulate the new Government led by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al Khaled Al Hamad Al Sabah.

Our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi congratulated his Kuwaiti counterpart and said, I quote: "Hearty congratulations and best wishes to His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, on his re-appointment as the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait, after the successful National Assembly elections on December 5th. I am confident that our excellent bilateral relations will continue to expand and flourish under the visionary leadership of His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait." External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar in his message to his counterpart said, I quote: "Congratulate FM Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah on his reappointment as Foreign Minister of Kuwait. Deeply value our historical friendship and strong ties. Look forward to continue working together to elevate our dynamic partnership to even greater heights." Unquote.

Dear Friends,

I thank the members of the Indian community for tuning in large numbers to listen to me today. I am happy that later today we will honour our children and others who won various prizes during the competitions

that Embassy organized during the last few months. I request you to continue to stay on line to encourage the winners.

It has been a little over four months since I arrived in Kuwait, with a mandate from our Hon'ble Rashtrapatiji to represent him and over 1.3 billion Indians in this important country and to enhance our relationship. As part of this mandate, I have a responsibility to be in constant touch with our community in Kuwait and also to regularly communicate with you on developments in our bilateral relations with Kuwait and also on the efforts being undertaken by the Embassy in streamlining and improving the Consular services and Community Welfare measures.

I would have loved to meet you all personally at the Embassy premises, but unfortunately due to the Covid 19 pandemic situation webinar and virtual meetings continue to be the best mode of engagement in these difficult times. I could not meet most of you on August 15, our independence day last year and I do not know whether we will be able to meet in large numbers on January 26, our Republic Day next year. I would like to mention that in the Embassy we strictly implement all guidelines related to Covid 19 pandemic and follow all norms of social distancing adhering to the Jan Andolan program against COVID-19 that Hon'ble Prime Minister launched in October. Within the constraints of Covid 19 pandemic I try my best to meet our community in small groups, while endeavoring to provide best possible consular service and continue our community welfare activities.

I have been meeting the community in small groups since my arrival. On an average, I have been meeting at least two groups each day in the last four months, and some of you through our Open House program. I have also been receiving a large number of emails and letters from various groups and community sharing their concerns on various issues and also coming up with ideas and suggestions in promoting our relations with Kuwait and also in improving the consular service and community welfare measures. I look forward to continue my engagement with each of the associations and groups and community members, of course, by following the Covid 19 pandemic related guidelines. As I am not able to meet our community in large numbers due to Covid situation, I thought it important to address all groups and associations virtually today, to brief you on what we have been doing and what we propose to do.

I thank our dear doctors, nurses and other medical personnel in Kuwait who work day in and day out to save lives, in our fight against Covid 19 pandemic. I thank the many community members and various associations who individually and in coordination with ICSG took several steps to help our brothers and sisters in need during the most difficult days of the pandemic. The crisis is still not over. We should spread the message to people not to panic and to remain calm and confident. I urge our medical professionals, teachers and office bearers of various associations to continue to offer their voluntary counselling services, particularly to the vulnerable segments of our society, and help them deal with the mental stress resulting from the ongoing pandemic.

Dear Friends,

The Gulf is a very important region for us. It is part of our extended neighborhood. With Kuwait we have historic relationship which can be traced back to several centuries.

Geographic proximity, historical trade links, cultural affinities, people to people connect and growing cooperation in key areas of mutual interest, including energy security, trade and investment, infrastructure development projects, petrochemicals and education continue to strengthen and broaden our longstanding partnership.

There are crucial areas, apart from trade and investment, such as security, fight against terrorism, defence, science and technology where we are in regular engagement with this important country. Some of the areas of mutual interest include information and communication technology, biotechnology, small and medium enterprises entrepreneurship, alternative energy sources, the list is long and expanding. Of course in each of these areas, we need to do more to realize the huge potential that exists. I believe that our vibrant community can play a significant role in building this partnership.

The leadership of our two countries are in regular contact giving us clear guidance and roadmap to strengthen our partnership at all levels. In April this year our Prime Minister held a telephone conversation with the Prime Minister of Kuwait. Our Foreign Ministers are in regular contact. Our Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas was here in October this year. On my part too, I continue to meet the leadership of this country at the political, official, business and cultural level to explore ways and means to deepen

our partnership. We will continue these efforts in coming weeks and months.

While we continue to maintain our regular engagement at the Government to Government level, it is important to state that India – Kuwait relationship is a partnership not only between governments and officials, it is a partnership involving many stakeholders; business establishments, industry and commercial chambers, investment boards, industry groups, factories, universities, science and technology establishments, academicians, scholars, students, innovation and research organizations, and importantly our Indian community with its most vibrant people to people contacts. I would like to call our relationship a Longstanding Dynamic Partnership. It is this partnership that I endeavor to promote and expand, and I seek your support and assistance in these efforts.

When each of our community members currently employed in Kuwait, do their assigned job with dedication, sincerity and honesty, they earn respect for themselves and for our country. I am happy that each of the Kuwaiti leaders and citizens that I met during the last few months, spoke so high of the hardworking, peace loving and law abiding qualities of our community. Such comments make us so proud of our community.

Many of you, as residents of Kuwait, are aware of the excellent relations that we maintain with this country. I thought it is important to reiterate this today in my address, as we are entering into an important phase of our relationship. In 2021-22 we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of establishment of our diplomatic relations. This is an important milestone in the history of our engagement. Similarly, for India 2021-22 is a very important year when we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Independence.

As part of these two important anniversaries, the Embassy plans to celebrate India in a big way in Kuwait. We plan to organize a series of events aimed at increasing our outreach within Kuwait, to project the new India and also to further deepen our engagement at political, economic, cultural, scientific and people to people levels. I would like each one of the associations, groups and individuals to contribute in these efforts.

Dear Friends,

One of the first decisions that I took on my arrival in Kuwait in August is to engage with all Indian associations and groups in Kuwait. I reviewed

an earlier decision to de-register some of our associations and groups in the past and reinstated all associations as our partners. I am happy that today all associations and groups in Kuwait are our partners in building our partnership with Kuwait. Almost all associations have now updated their contact details, those who have not updated, please do so.

I would like each of the associations and groups to come up with ideas aimed at celebrating 75th anniversary of our independence and 60th anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Many associations and groups have already sent in their ideas and suggestions to me. I urge those who have not sent their ideas and suggestions to share those with me either through email or letters. It is the same proposal that I have with our schools. Every cultural program, business program and outreach efforts that we do in Kuwait in 2021-22 could be made part of these important anniversary celebrations. To celebrate the 60th anniversary, I am looking at organizing 600 events and to celebrate the 75th anniversary I am looking at organizing 750 events.

As you are aware, the Embassy has in recent weeks set up three outreach platforms ICN, IPN, IBN. ICN (Indian Cultural Network) as a platform to highlight our cultural diversity and art forms and to recognize and promote the artistic skills within our diaspora. IPN (Indian Professionals Network) as a platform to learn from the expertise and experiences of our distinguished professionals here and imbibe the best practices. IBN (Indian Business Network) as platform to showcase India's economic and scientific transformation and to highlight the billion opportunities that India offers for business partnership. Similarly, in order to promote Indian culture and our rich literary heritage, we have launched a Thematic Library project.

I am also pleased to inform you that the Embassy, in association with IBN, has already organized a number of business promotion events under the theme of "Aatmanirbhar Bharat". Many more events are lined in the coming weeks/month ahead; we have sectoral events focusing on marine products and information technology; we have events promoting various States of India under the theme "State Facilitation". We will also be conducting our next regular Open House Session and a seminar on "Kuwaiti Labour laws" on 23 December 2020. I invite you all to attend these events.

I am happy to see the overwhelming response to many of our initiatives. I would invite all those who have not joined IBN, IPN, ICN platforms to participate in our various outreach efforts. In coming weeks and months, we will come up with various projects and initiatives through these platforms.

Today I am announcing the launch of 'Ambassador's Cup Annual Debate' and an 'Ambassador's Cup Elocution Competition' for our school children starting 2021. We will work with all our schools, principals, teachers and parents to organize a memorable program.

Dear Friends,

While most of our Kuwaiti friends have some connect with India, many are not aware of the steady economic and scientific transformation that India witnessed in recent years. We need to reach out to them. Many of our Kuwaiti friends have in their 'wish list' a visit to India. My endeavor is to move that from the 'wish list' to a 'to do' list. Get them to travel to India to experience the new India.

I would like India to be the first destination that our Kuwaiti friends visit in the post Covid 19 days. I need your support for that. Please invite your Kuwaiti friends and colleagues to visit India.

As I have discussed with some of you in our earlier interactions, even in these difficult times, in India, we have so many things to be proud of, we have so many things to celebrate and showcase. During the COVID crisis, despite our own many challenges, we extended a helping hand to many countries, we supplied medicines and our medical professionals travelled to many countries to assist the local governments.

Our commitment to build an Atmanirbhar Bharat, our march towards a New India, our scientific achievements, the progress being made in our medical research, our steady growth in infrastructure, our IT sector, our AI sector, our space program, our Chandrayan and Mangalayan missions, our new Education Policy, support to SMEs and Start Ups, Search for Clean technology, contributions in addressing climate change issues, our progress in solar, wind and nuclear energy sectors, our country is on a forward looking trajectory. These and many other elements of New India need to be projected in Kuwait and beyond. I need each of the Associations and Groups to participate in these outreach efforts.

Dear Friends,

While we work on our efforts to enhance our political, economic and cultural partnership, we in the Embassy are fully conscious of the fact that some of our brothers and sisters continue to face an unprecedentedly difficult situation today. Many have returned to India through the Vande Bharat Mission and other flights, many more are waiting to leave, while many in India are now eager to return back to Kuwait. There are many who are unable to visit their dear and near ones for months. Authorities in our two countries are in constant touch to address these issues, while keeping in view the evolving COVID pandemic. We are making steady progress and will keep you updated on a daily basis through our 24x7 helplines.

Let me reiterate this. Those who need help and support are not liabilities, they are not strangers; they are our brothers and sisters, they are not problems, they are our priorities. They will receive a warm welcome at the Embassy including a lunch and air ticket in each deserving cases on means tested basis.

Our open houses, our regular press releases, our multi lingual feedback forms will continue to bridge gaps. We have kept Suggestion/Complaint Boxes prominently at the Chancery premises and our passport offices. I assure you every suggestion and complaint will be taken seriously and acted upon. My endeavor is to make your visit to the Embassy a pleasant experience and to continue to improve the consular services and welfare measures. I have an excellent team of officers and staff members who are committed to make this happen.

Dear Friends,

2020 has been a very difficult year for all of us. I wish you a very different new year 2021. Let's pray it to be a year of prosperity and good health. Stay safe and stay healthy. I conclude my address today by thanking His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince for hosting the large Indian community in Kuwait.

I thank you for your patient hearing. I invite you to remain on line to witness the prize distribution ceremony for our winners.

Thank you.