Ambassador's Address at the Seminar on "Cyber Security",

August 26, 2021

Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Kuwait Technical College, Mr. Mishary Boodai,
Esteemed Technical Experts & Speakers at today's event,
Office bearers of the Institute of Engineers of India (IEI) Kuwait Chapter,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening to you all. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all here for today's special program on "Cyber Security".

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait for hosting the large Indian community in Kuwait and for the care and support the Government and the people of Kuwait continue to extend to the Indian community during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Dear Friends,

We are currently living in an age of advanced digital technology. This can most aptly be described as the cyber or digital information age. Yes, we still do have our traditional machines attending to the needs of production of materialistic goods. Yes, these machines are still housed in brick and mortar buildings and factories. But, the systems interconnecting and operating these machines and work spaces are fast turning digital and the entire planet has now been turned into an interlinked cyber network. Every relevant activity of human beings is becoming digitized, including work, education, governance, recreation and entertainment.

One can see this transformation or technological progress not only in the civilian realm of the society where we progressed from animal power to mechanical engine power to today's supercomputing power magnified by the power of cyber cloud space but also in the defense or military domain. Earlier wars were determined by who had better horses and elephants, then came the era of fire-power, now technology is playing a very important role in warfare or armed conflicts. From software to drones to UAVs, weapons and weapon systems are being digitized; technology is redefining the defence

sector like every other sector. In that sense, technology is also defining geopolitics at large.

Dear Friends,

Today, all of us are facing a gigantic challenge posed by Covid-19 pandemic. Governments, international bodies, NGOs, local bodies and families all are working towards helping each other in addressing the challenges that we face in India, in Kuwait and everywhere. Our COVID warriors have given their all in this protracted battle against the pandemic and are still standing up to save every life. We all have seen how this pandemic disrupted our movements. It has significantly changed our normal ways: of how we interact with each other, the way we live and work. Work and study has moved to our home environs, and videoconferencing has replaced social and business meetings. This digital form of interaction became new norm. Yet it was another example of human resilience. We saw how digital technology helped us to overcome this challenge. We saw how people adapted their behavior to accept new norms of virtual meetings and other measures quickly. Actually Covid-19 forced all of us to adapt us to digital transformation by increased use of cyber space and digital technologies. Our mobile phones have become extension of our bodies. In short, the onset of the pandemic last year has just propelled this cyber age even further with heavier dependence on technology.

Many nations around the world have turned this crisis into opportunity; amongst many such silver linings is an opportunity to reach the frontiers of digital technology. And India was one of the pioneers in this aspect. In fact, India faced the pandemic as a resurgent nation that operated digitally in every arena, throughout the lockdown period to keep not only its own growth clock ticking but also the growth engine of the world as a key player in the global supply chains. This pioneering of ours would not have been feasible without the dream of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi who had said and I quote, "For me IT + IT = IT" or, as he elaborated, "Indian Talent + Information Technology = India Tomorrow." Unquote.

This optimism and confidence in the strength of IT Industry to act as the growth engine for the country in the future is based on India's stellar track record and growth as a global digital superpower. And just to tell you briefly

on how we went about charting this incredible success story which is worth sharing for the larger benefit of everyone.

The road to our digital transformation was paved, inter alia, by Government of India's clear long term digital vision. The vision was backed up by a well laid out roadmap and operational plan which when materialized witnessed implantation of transformational Government initiatives that led to new digital platforms for the citizens and improved access to such platforms.

The Digital India programme is the centerpiece of the Government's vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The three vision areas of this programme are: building digital infrastructure as a core utility for every citizen, providing governance & services on demand, and digitally empowering citizens for achieving inclusive growth and development of the nation. Several important Government schemes, such as BharatNet, Make in India, Startup India and Standup India, industrial corridors, etc. are all integrated with the Digital India ecosystem.

One of the significant achievements in this impressive digital story of India is "Aadhaar", the world's largest biometric ID system. This system has won laurels from experts and institutions around the world for its technological excellence. World Bank Chief Economist Paul Romer described Aadhaar as "the most sophisticated ID programme in the world". Covering 99% of the over 1.3 billion Indian population, Aadhaar allows seamless access to important government digital services. A truly revolutionary leap which has transformed India's targeted welfare distribution system making it accessible and transparent.

Introduction of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is another significant achievement under the Digital India portfolio. UPI has introduced the benefits of digital payments to the nook and corner of the country. The pace of adoption of digital payments is completely transforming the Indian economy. UPI is now being used by all segments of the economy: from the street vendor to the kiranawala to the local departmental store to the large businesses. Just to share some stats: Indians have made 37.9 billion digital transactions in the current year alone. This is an increase of a whopping 27.9 billion from 2016, the year UPI was launched.

There are many other such significant achievements like the Electronic Customer Identification System (e-KYC), the Electronic Document Storage

System (DigiLocker), the Electronic Signature System (eSign) and so on. All of these digital solutions are streamlining business operations and propelling economic growth and development. The list of such achievements is lengthy and praiseworthy.

Dear Friends,

Technology solutions empowered by Digital India today serve as the backbone for other emerging innovations and applications in the fields of start-ups, banking and payment solutions, agritech, health tech, edu tech and so on. COWIN platform is a prime example of the leverage and scalability of digital solutions riding on the fundamentally strong digital infrastructure in India.

With such strong ecosystems in place, there is no denying that India is the land of billion opportunities in this digital age. Our existing platforms will truly help us turn the dreams of our billion plus people into realities and will enable realization of the dream of "Make in India, Made for the World."

Summing up our vision for future in the digital arena and exuding confidence in our capabilities Hon'ble Prime Minister had said and I quote, "India as a country is uniquely positioned to leap ahead in the information era. We have the best minds as well as the biggest market. Our local tech solutions have the potential to go global. India is at a sweet spot. It is time for tech-solutions that are designed in India but deployed for the world," Unquote.

Dear Friends,

Like with any other sector or domain, digital or cyber technology with its interconnected approach faces threats of cyber intrusion or cyber-attacks. Nations around the world are fighting battles to safeguard our sovereignty, jurisdiction and privacy from intrusive and anonymous threats dominating in the arena of cyberspace. The increase in digitalization post COVID-19 has rendered us more digitally vulnerable than ever before. India recorded 1.16 million cyber security cases in 2020, a 3 times increase from the previous year. These cyber targets target both public and private sectors, including sensitive Government infrastructure. Data breach incidents are reported almost every month. Personal data of customers, test results of students, even lab test results of patients are stolen from the digital systems, leaked and in some cases even put up online for sale.

A significant risk from cyberattacks is also posed to the economic and financial systems around the world. For example, the rise of digital payments has significantly increased complex cybercrimes involving digital payment transactions. Lending companies offer instant frictionless payment experiences to their consumers – which in turn leaves banks and entities operating in the payment ecosystem with very less time to identify and respond to cyber threats.

Therefore, Cyber security is the need of the hour. It is equally important like food security, our physical security. On the occasion of 74th Independence Day last year our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi said and I quote - In this era of technology, our dependence on cyberspace is going to increase multifold. However, cyberspace offers its own risks and threats. The world is very well aware of these. It can be a threat to the social fabric of our country, our economy and can even threaten the development of our nation; we are very well-aware of that. India is very cautious and is planning to take steps to combat these risks. Unquote.

To deal with this enormous challenge and in this context placing emphasis on the role of youth, Hon'ble Prime Minister had said and I quote, "our youth can play a big role in devising robust cyber security solutions, which can effectively "vaccinate" digital products against cyber-attacks and viruses."

Dear Friends,

We always consider Kuwait and other countries in the Gulf region as partners in our economic transformation including in our efforts to support the world in its digital transformation vision. Kuwait is a very important country in our extended neighborhood. Kuwait is part of India's energy security efforts and India is part of Kuwait's food security efforts. Both countries are having an excellent relationship, stretching back to several decades. The leadership of the two countries are in regular contact giving clear guidance and roadmap to strengthen our partnership at all levels. Hon'be Foreign Minister of Kuwait was in India in March this year and India's External Affairs Minister was in Kuwait in June this year. This is part of our increased exchanges in this year when we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. We have now set up a Joint Commission at the level of Foreign Ministers with a forward looking roadmap to take our longstanding dynamic relationship to a

new higher level of partnership. The roadmap envisages increasing cooperation and collaboration in a number of identified key sectors and domains. And one of these top priority areas is Digital/Cyber security.

It is in this context that I am very confident that this seminar would play the role of a catalyst in enhancing cooperation between our two friendly countries in this extremely important domain of cyber security. We have a shared vision of basing our future economies on advance scientific knowledge with cyber intelligence being at its core. To achieve our shared objectives and future goals in this direction, it is imperative that we join hands and leverage on the complementarities and synergies between our two ecosystems to propel our respective economies on to a much faster and higher growth trajectories.

Today's event is one of the series of programmes focused on Skill Development of Indian nationals in Kuwait. I am hopeful that today's webinar will help us to understand the basics of cyber security in our daily digital behavior. I am happy to note that Institution of Engineers (India), Kuwait chapter came forward to organize today's event in association with Kuwait Technical College, under the banner of India@75 and India-Kuwait@60.

I would like to stop here as we have experts in the field of cybersecurity to shed more light on this extremely relevant and technically rich and complex subject. I look forward to hearing from our esteemed speakers.

Stay Safe, stay healthy and stay blessed.

Thank You.