

Remarks by Amb Sibi George at the Inauguration of the Handloom Week in Kuwait, August 8, 2021

Good Afternoon Everybody,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Embassy of India, Kuwait

I stand here joining one million Indians in Kuwait and 1.3 billion Indians back home in celebrating our excellent performance in the Olympics. Yesterday was the greatest day in the history of Indian athletics, when Neeraj Chopra won gold medal for India in athletics. I recall meeting him in Switzerland when he was in Zurich to participate in the IAAF Diamond League finals in 2018.

Dear Friends,

Let's put our hands together in congratulating our hero Neeraj Chopra and the entire Indian team for their excellent performance in 2020 Olympics.

Thank you.

Dear Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to join you today at the inauguration of Indian Handloom Week in Kuwait. I congratulate the Commerce Wing of the Embassy for this initiative.

On this Friday, August 6, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India interacted with all Indian Ambassadors abroad and stakeholders of the trade & commerce sector via video conference which was attended by Secretaries of more than twenty departments of Government of India, state government officials, members of Export Promotion Councils and Chambers of Commerce.

In his address, Hon'ble Prime Minister said that along with celebrating the 75th anniversary of India's independence, this Azadi ka Mahotsav is an opportunity also to build a clear vision and roadmap for future India in which our export ambitions and all the stakeholders associated with it play a major role. He emphasized the role that diaspora can play to popularize Indian products abroad. In today's shrinking world new possibilities are being created for the expansion of our trade.

In his address, Hon'ble Prime Minister listed four factors that are very important for increasing our trade with the world. Firstly, manufacturing in the country has increased manifold and that has to be qualitatively competitive. Second, the problems of transport, logistics should be removed. For that Centre, States and private stakeholders will have to work continuously. Third, the government should walk shoulder to shoulder with the exporters and, finally, the international market for Indian products needs to be expanded. He said only when these four factors are synergized, India will be able to achieve the goal of Make in India for the world in a better way.

Dear Friends,

In this economic transformation of India, we consider each one of the other GCC countries including Kuwait as our natural partners. The economic and commercial relationship between the two countries is growing despite the challenges posed by Covid 19 pandemic and there exists huge potential for its expansion. In the short term, in our relations with Kuwait, there exists an opportunity to enhance our presence in sectors where we have been traditionally strong. This include sectors such as food materials, textiles, chemicals, gems and jewelry, engineering machinery etc. Thinking beyond short term, we could move up the value chain in several sectors such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, design outsourcing etc. It also gives opportunity to work on development of cutting edge technologies, ICT and AI across several sectors.

It is in this context that this event gains significance. It is part of our efforts to enhance our economic engagement with Kuwait, at the same time celebrating handloom industry in India which demonstrates the richness and diversity of Indian culture. Indian hand woven fabrics have been known since time immemorial. Of all the arts and crafts of India, traditional handloom textiles are probably among the oldest. Handloom in India is not just a piece of cloth. It actually enshrines a piece of our civilization.

The handloom industry in India has a long tradition of excellent craftsmanship, representing and preserving the vibrant Indian culture. Each region of India has its own textile tradition. From Jammu and Kashmir to Kerala and Tamil Nadu, from North East to Rajasthan and Gujarat, handloom in diverse variety and style is spread across thousands of towns and villages in all the States of India. In fact, there is hardly any village where weavers do not exist, each weaving out the traditional beauty of India's own precious heritage.

In popular culture, Handloom is mostly associated with sarees. But not just sarees, but in fact anything and everything from the humble handkerchief to stole, shawl, hat, towel, bed cover, cushion covers, jackets, even socks and shawls all can be found hand woven in different parts of India. The fabrics used are cotton, silk, wool and linen and many other such yarns.

Indian artists are now distinguished worldwide for their hand spinning, weaving and printing elegance and our handloom products are known all over the world. Having travelled all over the world as a diplomat, I can say for sure from experience that India's handloom products are among the most sought after Indian products anywhere in the world today including in the Gulf and in Kuwait. A Pashmina Shawl of Jammu & Kashmir or a Kanchipuram Saree of Tamil Nadu or a Kasavu Mundu of Kerala or a Stole of Mizoram are sought after products of India.

Yesterday, I visited the Al Sadu House museum in Kuwait where I was delighted to see the strong connect between India and Kuwait in textiles industry particularly in the handloom sector. For many generations, Kuwaiti weavers were importing dyes from India.

Dear Friends,

India's textiles sector is one of the oldest industries in the Indian economy, dating back to several centuries. The industry is extremely varied, with hand-spun and hand-woven textiles sectors at one end of the spectrum, while the capital-intensive sophisticated mills sector on the other end. India is the world's second largest exporter of textiles and clothing. The Indian textiles and apparel industry contributes 12% to export earnings and held 5% of the global trade in textiles and apparel. It is expected to grow to US\$ 190 billion by FY 2026.

In this modern textile industry, India's handloom sector continues to have a significant position. With over six million people directly and indirectly involved, the handloom industry is the second-largest employment provider for the rural population in India after agriculture.

Indian handloom industry products are known for their unique designs and finesse. The industry has a strong infrastructure with about 2.4 million looms of varied designs and construction, indicating significant production capacity. The export of handloom products from India is valued at around US\$ 350 million annually. Nearly 15% of cloth production in India is from the handloom sector.

On August 7, we observe national handloom day. On this day, India honours the handloom weaving community for their immense contribution to the socio-economic development of the country. The day also marks India's reaffirmation of protecting its glorious handloom heritage and empowering weavers and workers with greater opportunities to ensure livelihoods. In 2015, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi declared August 7 as National Handloom Day. This is the seventh year that the country will celebrate National Handloom Day.

Not only does Handloom Day celebrate India's rich handloom heritage but it also commemorates a significant historical event. On August 7, 1905, Swadeshi Movement was launched in Kolkata which also focused on reviving domestic production, encouraging indigenous industries and the spirit of Swadeshi. We are all proud of the significant role that handloom played in our independence movement. Mahatama Gandhi reintroduced hand spinning in the name of Khadi which essentially means hand spun and hand woven. Every Indian was urged to spin the yarn using Charkhas and wear Khadi. Charkha continues to be a symbol of India's freedom struggle and self-reliant India.

The Government of India and the Textile Ministry of India today is doing everything possible to ensure that the weaver gets his dues, that the handloom clusters of India are revived and they benefit from the modern technology while the essence of their craft and art is preserved. Today it is heartening that new age e-retail platforms, the instagram and different websites and portals are giving direct access to untapped markets to our weavers. Today a weaver can showcase his art form, his product and anyone sitting anywhere in the world can tap on it, contact him and order that handloom item. They may receive it because the delivery services are now made available almost all over the world and this means that the weaver gets best price possible for his product. So, the essence of National Handloom Day is to make sure that the art forms of weaving are preserved, recognized, acknowledged and weaver gets his dues so that he preserves the art of weaving as well as carry it to the next generation while earning his fair share of profit.

In his message on the occasion of National Handloom Day, Hon'ble Prime Minister said, I quote: "Handlooms manifest India's diversity and the dexterity of countless weavers and artisans. National Handloom Day is an occasion to reiterate support to our weavers by enhancing the spirit of #MyHandloomMyPride. Let us support local handloom products."

I am happy that we will be celebrating this week as Handloom Week in Kuwait. Most members of the Mission are in handloom dress today. We have a series of events planned for this week.

Our endeavor here at the Embassy of India, Kuwait is to make sure that every Kuwaiti and everyone resident in Kuwait know the incredible diversity and richness of Indian handlooms. They can explore the possibility of buying anything that they like directly from India and that this awareness leads to them travelling to these incredible places after which many of the weaves are named, be it Bhagalpur or Venkatagiri or Narayanpet or Kanchipuram or Paithan. These are all sources of great beauty and aesthetic art of weaving.

I invite our Kuwaiti friends to be partners in India's economic progress and try out more Indian products. I invite each one of you to check in your wardrobes which piece of handloom you own already, to cherish it, to wear it and to take your photographs and upload them on social media under the # My Handloom My Pride and #Indian Handloom Week, Kuwait. The endeavor is to celebrate together this rich heritage and make sure that our new generation knows about this and as much enthusiasm as we show in buying branded clothes from the big metropolis of the western world, let us also cherish, preserve and celebrate this rich history and tradition which helps us to tell a story every time we wear something that has survived and thrived through centuries. I invite the Indian diaspora to join hands with the Embassy and other stakeholders in generating more interest for India and Indian products among our Kuwait friends and other expatriates.

I thank the importers of handloom products and textiles from India. We in the Embassy look forward to working with them and all stakeholder to expand our trade with Kuwait.

Thank you and good evening.
