

## **TRANSCRIPT OF THE REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR SIBI GEORGE AT THE OPEN HOUSE AT THE EMBASSY, AUG 26, 2020**

Good Afternoon everybody, A very warm welcome to Embassy of India,

This is our second Open House. I see many new faces today.

It has been a very hectic week for the Embassy. We received several mails and phone calls for joining the Open House today. Due to the Covid pandemic situation we could not accommodate all the requests.

Let me begin today's open house by thanking His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah 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 friendship and support. I need not introduce the Embassy team, you know them.

As I mentioned in the last open house, we continue to receive several hundred emails/letters on a number of topics, general topics, community related topics and many on personal issues. These are difficult times, everyone is facing many difficulties and many of the mails and suggestions are related to the difficulties being faced due to the Covid situation. The issues being raised continues to be the cases of Indians stranded in Kuwait, Indians with resident permit in Kuwait and currently stranded in India, those who want travel documents, those who applied travel documents but yet to receive them, those who received travel documents but could not travel during amnesty, expiry of resident permits, groups who face non-payment of salary, nonpayment of arrears, labor disputes, cheating by agents, loss of jobs and livelihood, loss of documents, those who do not have food, shelter and medicines, request from those who got stranded in ships, engineers issues including on NOC for engineering degrees, delays in getting appointments for consular services at the Indian passport centers, dispatch of mortal remains of loved ones who died here, pending death compensation cases, family disputes, and so on. The Mission continues to receive several calls on the 24x7 helplines. These helpline numbers are displayed on our website prominently. The Embassy continues to take action

on each of these issues. We have several success stories during last week. Most are work in progress.

I am happy to note that we have some positive developments. The Vande Bharat Mission has resumed and regular flights are flying to different cities in India. It is gratifying to note that the gentleman who raised a request to travel to Amritsar has since returned to Amritsar. The demand for travel to India is reducing. Some Air India flights had to be cancelled due non availability of passengers. We have also people who are stranded in India, currently returning to Kuwait via Dubai. We have also taken up the matter with the Kuwaiti authorities requesting permission for people stranded in India, to return directly to Kuwait. We have discontinued the appointment system at passport centers and also instructed that all applications are to be accepted on the same day, the timing of the passport centers have also been increased. The Consular Staff of the Embassy has been working on Fridays and Saturdays. They will also be working in coming weekend. We will have a short presentation on some of the issues.

In addition to the interactions we have at the Open House, we thought it is important to have a theme for each of the Open House meetings. The theme is decided on the basis of mails and suggestions received. Today's theme is 'Indian Community Welfare Fund', we will discuss how to get assistance from the ICWF. We have opened ICWF Application boxes at the Embassy and also at the three passport offices to make the fund accessible to the Indians in distress. We are also uploading the ICWF assistance forms on Embassy website. I have set up a three member committee headed by Deputy Chief of Mission to examine each of the assistance requests as per guidelines from Government of India and make their recommendations. Our endeavor is to get a decision on each of the requests on the same day itself. I look forward to have suggestions and ideas from you for better utilization of Fund.

We will have 'Engineers issue' as the theme of the next Open House on September 2. I held a few round of discussions with some groups and individuals on the issue. I am getting requests from various individuals,

groups and associations for meetings to discuss the issue. This week, I had a two hour long discussion with a team of senior engineers who are well versed with the issue. While we are in touch with the Indian and Kuwaiti authorities on this important issue, I thought it is important to have an Open House discussion on the matter. I invite all interested to participate to join us on Sept 2. You could also write to [community.kuwait@mea.gov.in](mailto:community.kuwait@mea.gov.in).

I thank the volunteers and association representatives who are present here today. I hear many stories of the help they extend to people in this difficult times, including through supply of food, assistance in hospitals etc. Thanks to one and all for their services.

Before I conclude, I would like to use this opportunity to thank Shri PP Narayanan, First Secretary (Community Welfare) for his service to the Indian community in Kuwait. He was a major pillar of this Mission, actively leading the Welfare Wing of the Embassy from the front. In the last three weeks when I am here, I heard a lot from friends on how he personally handled several key issues. He has also briefed me on many of our social workers and volunteers, giving me a fair idea on their support and activities. This is the last Open House of Shri Narayanan, he is retiring on August 31. I wish him and his wife a very happy, healthy and prosperous retired life. Personally I will miss him. I am sure many of you present here in this Open House will also miss him. Let's all give him a standing ovation today. Thank you Shri Narayanan.

Dear Friends,

I conclude my remarks by thanking His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for hosting the Indian community in Kuwait.

Thank you.

Now let's move on to the next item in the Agenda.

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