

TRANSCRIPT OF THE REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR SIBI GEORGE AT THE VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE AT THE EMBASSY, DEC 23, 2020

Good Afternoon everybody, A very warm to our Open House of December 2020,

Our Open House has now been settled for the last Wednesday of every month at 3.30 PM. It is still virtual, actually completely virtual. I hope, in coming months, we will be able to organize it in at least a hybrid format, with selected few at the auditorium and others online.

Let me begin today's open house by thanking His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Crown Prince His Highness Sheikh Mishaal 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 express my heartfelt condolences on the passing away of His Excellency Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, who was the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Kuwait. I have conveyed my condolences on behalf of Government of India and our community here. He was a close friend of India, who loved India and Indians. With his passing away, India lost a well-wisher and close friend in Kuwait. He will be missed by the Indian community in Kuwait.

Let me also begin by reiterating my concern on the evolving Covid 19 situation. We need to be extremely careful, on the evolving Covid situation. We need to maintain all precautions and meet all guidelines as instructed by Government of the State of Kuwait. In fact, I have cancelled a few important hybrid events that we had planned to organize in the Embassy auditorium. We are hearing new worrisome news on evolving Covid 19 pandemic situation. Perhaps we should start calling it Covid 20 or Covid 21 pandemic. The new variant of the virus which multiplied rapidly in London and in the UK, supplanting older variants has led to further travel restrictions including close down of airports across the world including in Kuwait. This has affected many, including those who are stranded in India and are on transit at various third countries. We are working with the authorities on how to address these issues, while we address the crisis due to the new corona virus strain. Situation is really bad, but we should not lose hope. I would like to mention

that our ICSG continues to be active and ready to continue its efforts. Later in the day, a meeting of ICSG will be held to take stock of the situation.

Dear Friends,

My first priority in the Mission now is to ensure that we continue the Consular Service without interruption. We should not have a situation whereby we end up closing down the Consular Service at the Embassy or at our passport offices. I urge all associations and groups to continue to urge all to follow the Covid pandemic guidelines in letter and spirit, including during their visits to Embassy and our passport offices. Our Consular Open House is continuing every day. Anyone who has consular issues could meet my colleague Shri Amitabh Ranjan in this daily open house, or send an email to us. We are responding to each of the serious mails and to comments on feedback forms. Shri Amitabh Ranjan will look after Consular Service during the leave period of Shri Ranveer Bharati.

In the meantime, I continue my meetings and interaction with the authorities discussing ways and means to elevate our partnership with Kuwait in various fields. I also meet and discuss with them issues of concern and interest to our diaspora. Yesterday, I visited the Deportation Center under the Ministry of Interior and met all its officers, I also met some of the inmates to personally talk to them. I thank the Deportation authorities for their cooperation in helping Indian inmates for their early departure to India. We continue to provide assistance from ICWF to all deserving cases, including food, lunch at the Embassy, air tickets and travel arrangements for hospital patients. There are regular visits to the jails, detention centers, deportation centers and police stations by the Embassy officials. We will continue all of this, in coming days and weeks.

We will later update you on the ongoing Emergency Certificate drive. We continue to receive applications for Emergency Certificates. Our endeavor is to issue the Emergency Certificates on the same day, to avoid them from travelling to the Embassy multiple times. Our decision to issue emergency certificates on the same day is causing some delay in issuing passports, but this is being addressed by undertaking passport preparation work during weekends. At the same time there are a few hundred Emergency Certificates ready for collection, which are yet to be collected by applicants. I urge all applicants to collect their Emergency Certificates. I am happy that we have

worked out a mechanism for their return travel without much hassle, an arrangement that helps many stranded EC holders.

Let me reiterate that the Embassy acknowledges the service of volunteers and many associations who are wholeheartedly working to help the fellow citizens in Kuwait. The doors of the Embassy will always be open for them and for all our citizens in Kuwait. There would be absolutely no restrictions on entry of any Indians to the Embassy. This is home away from home. All are always welcome, including during closed holidays or after office hours for any emergency service. At the same time volunteers have a responsibility to ensure that their services are entirely voluntary and free. At no stage they should charge any fee for their voluntary service, and should not violate any law of India or Kuwait.

As I said before, I do not see the open house as a grievance redressal mechanism alone. It is much more than that. Of course I look forward to listening to any grievances, comments and suggestions at these Open Houses. Of course those will unresolved grievances and difficulties are our priorities, and we will address all their concerns. I would like these open houses also to be platforms to disseminate information on the activities of the Embassy in Kuwait. This is to supplement the various press releases and social media bulletins that we issue regularly. We have made some progress on various issues such as JEE exam center in Kuwait, Engineers issue. We have established a liaison with the Kuwaiti Society of Engineers Office including through a weekly meeting by the officers of the Mission. This is a work in progress.

This month we have taken 'Labour Laws and Overseas Employment in Kuwait' as the theme for our Open House. We will have a presentation on this theme by Shri Sibi U.S, Second Secretary (Labour).

Let me now introduce the officers of the Mission. We will move the camera, starting with our Deputy Chief of Mission.

My colleague Mr. Fahad Suri will now make a presentation on what we did during November 2020. After the presentation we will be happy to hear your comments and suggestions and answer your questions. Then we move on to our presentation on the Labour Laws of Kuwait by Shri Sibi U.S.

Thank you.