

REMARKS BY AMB SIBI GEORGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE ONAM CELEBRATIONS AT THE EMBASSY, AUGUST 22, 2021

Good Evening everybody,

A very warm welcome to Embassy of India.

I extend my greetings to all Indians in Kuwait on the occasion of Onam festival. `

I would like to start my quoting from the messages issued by our leadership in India on the occasion of Onam. Hon'ble Rashtrapati Ji said, "Onam greetings to all our fellow citizens! This festival is a celebration of the new harvest. It highlights the tireless work of farmers. It is an occasion to express gratitude to Mother Nature. I wish progress and prosperity for all fellow citizens." Hon'ble Vice President of India said in his message, "My warm greetings on the auspicious occasion of Onam today. It marks the beginning of harvest season in various parts of our country. Onam also honours the memory of great King Mahabali of Kerala, who is celebrated for his nobility and generosity". And Hon'ble Prime Minister said, I quote: "Best wishes on the special occasion of Onam, a festival associated with positivity, vibrancy, brotherhood and harmony. I pray for everyone's good health and wellbeing."

As Ambassador of India to Kuwait I join our leadership and our brothers and sisters in India to greet all fellow citizens in Kuwait a Happy Onam.

Dear Friends,

Onam is a special occasion for the Indian community in Kuwait. Over the years it has become one of the most celebrated and most awaited festivals of India not only by the Malayalee community but most in Indian community and many among our Kuwaiti friends.

I remember and extend our greetings and thanks to our dear doctors, nurses and other medical professional for their selfless service to us in this difficult times of pandemic. Onam is an occasion also to remember the families of those who lost their battle against the pandemic and left us. Let's do everything possible for those who need our support. It is also time

to extend our special greetings to our children who used to celebrate Onam festival every year with great enthusiasm.

In the pre-Covid 19 era we used to have several weeks of celebrations. Even now, despite the many challenges of the pandemic, Onam is celebrated with a lot of enthusiasm in families and in smaller groups and yes virtually too. I thank all those who worked hard to make today's celebrations a grand success. A lot of effort has gone into in preparing the pookalam and also in arranging the dance and music. I thank the Cultural Wing and each of those who contributed and participated in the onam celebrations.

Yesterday I had the honour of welcoming fellow Ambassadors in Kuwait for an Onam lunch at India House and showcase our rich and varied cultural diversity. Today morning we celebrated Onam with sharing of Payasam and sweets with each of the visitors at the Embassy and also at our three passport offices. Yesterday our brothers and sisters in shelter too had joined in the celebrations. And today we are celebrating it virtually here.

Dear Friends,

I don't think that anyone in this audience or those of my Malayalee friends listening to us today needs to be told about the civilizational importance of Onam. But there is an audience out there whom we should reach out spreading the message of our rich cultural diversity and festivals like Onam. By celebrating Onam we are celebrating our history, our civilizational ethos, our family values and above all the spirit of vasudaiva kudumbakam that we are all proud of. We have a responsibility to bring up our children and grandchildren realizing and appreciating the values of our festivals like Onam, the values of positivity, vibrancy, brotherhood and harmony that Hon'ble Prime Minister mentioned in his message on Onam.

As citizens of India and proud Indians we also have a responsibility to tell the whole world about our rich culture and traditions. Yesterday when I briefed the Ambassadors of other countries on the origin, tradition and values of Onam, I realized that I need to do more to spread the message of India, among our Kuwaiti friends and also other foreign nationals around us.

I recall an experience that I mentioned to you earlier in Switzerland. I was addressing a reputed diplomatic school in Geneva. Present were the faculty and students from many countries, mostly European countries. As I was speaking on India's Foreign Policy, I thought it is important to start with a basic question. A question about our two pioneer diplomats in ancient India. I asked them whether they heard about our epic 'Ramayana', where Lord Hanuman, as a messenger of Lord Rama travelled all the way to Lanka and try to avoid a war with King Ravana. I also asked them whether they heard about our epic 'Mahabharata' where Lord Krishna tried to avoid the war between Pandavas and Kaurvas. I also asked them whether they heard about Arthasastra by Kautilya our Chanakya written several hundreds of years before Machiavelli wrote his world famous The Prince. I was surprised to know that most of the students had not heard about Ramayana or Mahabharata or Arthasastra. Of course, many of them had a lot of knowledge about India, some even practiced yoga and tried some form of Ayurveda. But not many knew about our epics or our festivals.

I am convinced that we need to do more work in spreading our message and our civilizational values abroad. In Kuwait, the celebrations of our 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations and 75th anniversary of our independence provide us with a unique occasion to do that. I am happy that most our associations are joining hands with us to celebrate India in Kuwait. I invite you all to join hands with our embassy to celebrate India in Kuwait, together let's celebrate every festival of India here.

Once again I wish each one of you a very happy Onam.

Thank you.