

**REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR SIBI GEORGE ON THE OCCASION OF THE
INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS OF INDIA IN KUWAIT, AUG 15, 2020**

My fellow citizens, Friends of India,

On the occasion of the independence day of India, I extend greetings to all Indians in Kuwait. Let's join our 1.3 billion brothers and sisters in India and millions of Indian Diaspora abroad and billions of our friends across the world to celebrate this occasion.

Let me begin by thanking His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah for hosting the large Indian community in Kuwait. I pray for the good health of His Highness. I thank the Government of the State of Kuwait and Kuwaiti friends of India for their efforts and support in strengthening the bilateral relations between our two friendly countries.

Let me also begin by joining our Hon'ble Rashtrapatiji and the entire nation in saluting the martyrs of Galwan Valley. Those worthy sons of Bharat Mata lived and died for national pride.

I also convey my heartfelt condolences to the families of those who lost their dear ones in the tragic flight accident in Kerala last week and in the floods and cyclones in several parts of India. These are difficult times.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This being my first address after assuming charge as Ambassador here, I thought is important to share my thoughts today. I have a slightly long speech.

As Hon'ble Rashtrapatiji said, our Independence Day celebrations today all over the world are rather restrained, it is different from the celebrations that we are used to. In Kuwait, this day was an occasion for many of community members to come together in large numbers here, meet together, greet together and celebrate together our values and our ethos.

Last year, Indians from all walks of life in Kuwait, seniors and juniors, students and teachers, children and parents, professionals and their family members, doctors and nurses, businessmen, social workers and volunteers, skilled and semiskilled workers, domestic workers were here to celebrate our independence day. My greetings to all of them whose presence we miss here today. I am told that there were seniors who attended our flag hoisting ceremonies

without a break for over forty/fifty years. I extend them all my special greetings today.

Today, on this solemn occasion, let's recall the patriotic songs that our school children sang for us at the Republic Day function in January this year. Let's also think about the parents and the teachers who are striving today to bring up their children in the new normal of a Covid affected world, and Government and School authorities trying their best to avoid 2020 being a zero academic year; let's salute our medical professionals, doctors and nurses, who risk their lives trying to save the lives of others; let's also remember and thank other professionals, our businessmen, our journalists, our skilled, semiskilled and other workers who perform their duties without fail despite all the odds. It is their services that enable us to continue to lead a near normal life today.

I thank His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Government of the State of Kuwait and many citizens of this friendly country for their support to the Indian community during these difficult times. I thank His Highness and the Government of the State of Kuwait for the special Amnesty that helped many of our brothers and sisters to return to their homeland. We will facilitate the departure of those who could not leave and are keen to return to India.

Dear Friends,

We in the Embassy are fully conscious of the fact that some of our brothers and sisters face an unprecedentedly difficult situation today. Many have returned to India through the Vande Bharat Mission and other flights, many more are waiting to leave, while many in India are now eager to return back to Kuwait. There are many who are unable to visit their dear and near ones for months. I see their frustration in their many tweets, mails and telephone calls that we receive in the Embassy. Let me assure you, authorities in our two countries are in constant touch to address these issues, while keeping in view the evolving COVID pandemic. We will keep you updated on a daily basis through our 24x7 helplines.

I would like to place on record my heartfelt thanks to the members of the Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) who led a humanitarian mission voluntarily with full commitment and dedication to ensure that no Indian will go hungry here. During the last few months we have distributed food stuff of almost five lakh meals. I thank the Government of Kuwait and our Kuwaiti friends who helped us in this endeavor. I also thank our doctors and other medical professionals who extended free medical services to the needy. I thank office

bearers and members of our many associations and groups and our many social workers and volunteers who worked hand in hand with the Embassy and ICSG, in these difficult times.

We will continue and expand these efforts. Let me emphasize this. Those who need help and support are not liabilities, they are not strangers; they are our brothers and sisters, they are not problems, they are our priorities. I look forward to ideas and suggestions from each one of our fellow citizens to strengthen our efforts.

Dear Friends,

These are difficult times. But, we are in it together. We in the Embassy are committed to ensure that those in distress get support and find solutions for their grievances, in coordination with the concerned authorities in Kuwait and in India. I again thank the Government of Kuwait for their cooperation. This is a work in progress. Together we can and we will overcome these difficult times.

In fact, this is the time we need everyone to work together for the welfare of the community. In this context, I reviewed the decision to de-register some of our associations and groups in the past. I consider each of the voluntary groups as beautiful flowers in the garden of Indian diaspora.

I look forward to connecting digitally with each one of you and hear your ideas and suggestions on how to strengthen our engagement with Kuwait, how to increase awareness about the economic and scientific transformation in India, how to serve our community better, how to further improve our consular services and how to contribute in building an Atmanirbhar Bharat. We look forward to work with each and every one, so long as they fully adhere to the laws of the host country and that of India. Embassy is Home Away from Home for our Indians. Our doors are always open for all.

Our open houses, our consular bulletins and our regular newsletters will bridge gaps, if any, that exists. Let me remind you, there is absolutely zero tolerance in the Embassy for any form of corruption, nepotism, favoritism, dishonesty, exploitation, fraud, prejudice, bias or partisanship. We have kept Suggestion/Complaint Boxes prominently at the Chancery premises and our passport offices. I assure you every suggestion and complaint will be taken seriously and acted upon.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, I stand here representing one of the oldest, largest and perhaps among the very few continuous major civilizations in the world. One feels so proud and honored to represent a fast growing modern nation, with a rich civilizational history, and has over 1/6th of the population of the world. With a population of 1.3 billion, every sixth person today in the world is an Indian. We also have over 30 million Indian diaspora abroad. Well assimilated, this diaspora is studded with Nobel Laureates, CEOs and CFOs of major companies, distinguished medical professionals, architects, engineers, IT experts, bankers, artists, spiritual leaders and scholars.

Indian diaspora wherever they are, including here in Kuwait, have produced successful entrepreneurs, beloved educationists, highly talented and experienced professionals, stars in every field and absolutely law abiding associates for their Kuwaiti partners. In Kuwait, Indians enjoy so much appreciation from our Kuwaiti friends for their talent, discipline, commitment, honesty, dedication and sincerity to their job. I thank our seniors and our brothers and sisters who spent several years in this country building a good reputation for India and Indians. We respect them, we salute each one of them.

At the same time, let me also say this. I see more and more of our fellow citizens take to social media to comment on each and every issue, regional, national and international. Given our credentials as citizens of the largest democracy in the world, which we are all proud of, this is something we always cherish. We are brought up in an environment of free speech. But with that freedom comes a big responsibility, a responsibility to respect each other, appreciate each other and understand each other, a responsibility to act as responsible and law abiding citizens.

When we are abroad, we have a bigger responsibility to obey each and every laws of our host country and respect the customs and traditions of this land. Let me reiterate, under no circumstances we should knowingly or unknowingly, wittingly or unwittingly, violate any of the laws of this country. We should do nothing that would directly or indirectly hurt the social, political, religious or any other feelings and sentiments of others.

We all come from different parts of India, North, South, East, West and North East. In India, we speak different languages, we worship different Gods, we eat different foods, we wear different clothes, we believe in different political ideologies but there is the feeling of oneness and common consciousness, a

civilizational bond that makes us all proud Indians. We all are proud of our country, our unity in diversity.

For us, Independence Day is an occasion to recall our non - violent mass based struggle for independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and our seventy four years of political, economic, and social transformation that transcended our differences and bind us together in a civilizational bond and shared sense of citizenship.

We will endeavor to bring up our children in Indian values and ethos. As Hon'ble Prime Minister said today, Education has a key role in the making of Atmanirbhar, modern, new and prosperous India. At the Embassy, we are launching an 'India Familiarization Program' inviting all Indian children in Kuwait to visit Indian Embassy and learn more about India, learn about the working of the Embassy, which is the only Government of India office in this country. We will work with our schools to locate the artistic talents in our children, recognize and promote them. We are launching a series of programs to get more connected with our schools, our children and our teachers.

We will together observe every Indian festival here, we will together remember, honour and pay homage to every Indian hero. We will together cherish and uphold the values and principles of our constitution in our interaction with one another. We will together enjoy our diverse cuisine, myriad of our art forms and our cultural heritage. We will hold regular familiarization events on each of our States and regions. Together we will celebrate India every day, everywhere, with everyone, while strictly adhering to the laws and traditions of our host country.

We will expand our outreach and delivery channels including through various social media and other digital platforms. We are launching new social media vessels of ICN, IPN, IBN and a digital Thematic Library through twitter and other social media to reach out to everyone sharing the India story, its cultural heritage, the story of our new India and its economic and scientific transformation. ICN (Indian Cultural Network) will be a social media platform to highlight our cultural diversity and art forms and to recognize and promote the artistic skills within our diaspora. IPN (Indian Professionals Network) will be a social media platform to learn from the expertise and experiences of our distinguished professionals here and imbibe the best practices. IBN (Indian Business Network) will be a social media platform to showcase India's economic and scientific transformation and to highlight the billion opportunities that India offers for business partnership.

Even in these difficult times, in India, we have so many things to be proud of, we have so many things to celebrate. During the COVID crisis, despite our own many challenges, we extended a helping hand to many countries, we supplied medicines and our medical professionals travelled to many countries to assist the local governments.

Our commitment to build an Atmanirbhar Bharat, our march towards a New India, our scientific achievements, the progress being made in our medical research, our steady growth in infrastructure, our IT sector, our AI sector, our space program, our Chandrayan and Mangalayan missions, our new Education Policy, support to SMEs and Start Ups, Search for Clean technology, contributions in addressing climate change issues, our progress in solar, wind and nuclear energy sectors, our country is on a forward looking trajectory.

As Hon'ble Prime Minister said in his address today, Amid Covid-19 pandemic 130 crore Indians took the resolve to be self-reliant and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' is on the mind of India. We must be 'vocal for local'. This dream is turning into a pledge. Atmanirbhar Bharat has become a 'mantra' for the 130 crore Indians today. As Hon'ble Rashtrapatiiji said today, India's self-reliance means being self-sufficient without alienating or creating distance from the world. It implies that India will continue to engage with the world economy while maintaining its identity.

Dear Friends,

In its transformational journey, India regards Kuwait as a natural partner. There is vast scope to combine our relative advantages, in capital, energy, technology, science and human resources, and to work for mutual benefit.

India's Flagship Programmes like Make in India, Smart Cities, Digital India, Swachh Bharat (Clean India), Startup India, Skill India, Ayushman Bharat and many other initiatives have several sectors with huge potential to build on our relations with our Kuwaiti partners. We will endeavor to generate awareness on this among all our Kuwaiti friends through regular events and focused activities captioned 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Momentum in India' series and also through a social media outreach and regular digital bulletins. I urge all friends of India to join hands with us in this endeavor.

I am happy to note that our bilateral relationship continues to expand. Leaders of our two countries are in regular touch. You would recall the deployment

of Rapid Response Team from India comprising specialist doctors and paramedics. Our relationship with Kuwait is a partnership not only between governments and officials, it is a partnership involving several stakeholders; universities, business establishments, industry and commercial chambers, our PSUs, investment boards, industry groups, factories, science and technology establishments, academicians, scholars, artists, students, innovation and research organizations, hotels and hospitality firms, museums, libraries and above all our vibrant people to people contacts. I look forward to work with each of these stakeholders to take our relationship forward. The exponents of Yoga and Ayurveda will have a prominent place in our order of things.

Dear Friends,

We will not let 2020 or 2021 be a zero year for building our partnership. We will endeavor to make it a vibrant year of activities starting from today. I urge all to share your ideas and suggestions with me. We will take every step possible to strengthen the partnership of New India with New Kuwait, in collaboration with all our friends and well-wishers.

Starting January 1, 2021 India is a member of the UN Security Council, in 2021 we will celebrate our 75th independence day and host the G-20 summit. Next year we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of establishment of our diplomatic relations with Kuwait. Let's celebrate it all together and also work towards building an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

Before I conclude, let me reiterate. We value our partnership with the State of Kuwait. Kuwait is a key partner in our extended neighbourhood. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to strengthen our partnership with Kuwait for the prosperity and wellbeing of the people of our two countries.

I thank you for your patient hearing. I promise to be brief in my speeches in coming days, weeks, months and years.

Once again I wish you a very happy independence day.

Jai Hind, Jai Hind, Jai Hind.

.....