

Remarks by Amb Sibi George at the 'Launch of COVID-19 Vaccine Awareness Campaign' & 'Roundtable on COVID PLUS'
May 31, 2021

President of Indian Doctors' Forum Dr. Amir Ahmed, Moderator for the panel Discussion today Dr. Ramesh Pandita, Senior Doctors who are in our panel today, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening to you all. Welcome to Embassy of India.

I begin my address today by thanking His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness Sheikh Mishaal Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait for hosting the large Indian community in Kuwait and for the care and support the Government and the people of Kuwait extend to the Indian community during the Covid 19 pandemic.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the leadership, Government and the people of the State of Kuwait for the timely assistance provided to India during the second wave of peak COVID-19 infections witnessed by India. I would also like to convey my heartfelt appreciation to the Indian Community in Kuwait for their contribution in mobilizing oxygen supplies to India.

Vasudaiva Kutumbakam, meaning the world is one, is central to India's civilizational ethos. Standing true to our ethos and age old beliefs, when it was India's turn to put its production and delivery capacity to help all humanity in fighting the virus, we did that. India extended medical and other assistance to more than 150 countries in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic when the global crisis has severely tested the resilience of all nations. India's rapid response teams were deployed in 8 countries. Indian naval vessels and air force airplanes delivered supplies along a wide arc to friends and partners. Now, when the second wave of COVID-19 infections has suddenly tested India's capacity, the world has stepped in. This is what collective struggle is all about and the world needs to fight this battle in a cohesive and coordinated manner.

I thank Indian Doctors' Forum, its President Dr. Amir Ahmed and senior doctors who have joined us today as panelists and experts. The IDF team is our trusted partner; the team is always in the forefront of the efforts of the Embassy in ensuring the welfare of the Indian community in

Kuwait. I thank IDF for its humanitarian efforts and its many endeavors in supporting the Indian community in its efforts to fight the pandemic.

Dear Friends,

We are all well aware of how COVID-19 is changing the course of our living history. It is a global challenge of a magnitude that humanity has not experienced in recent memory. It is continuing to throw up new challenges to every country, every society and every family including in India and here in Kuwait. With each passing day, once gets to hear of a new development as far COVID-19 is concerned; we hear of new variant rearing its ugly head in some part of the world and the consequent fear of its spread to other countries around the world; or we get to hear of the occurrence of second, third or even fourth wave of new peak infections; or we get to hear of the new complications medical experts, scientists are discovering in COVID affected individuals; and so on.

By recounting all these, I do not want to sound pessimistic nor do I wish to scare you all; what I really intend to do is to tell you that this challenge that we face is an evolving one. It is rapidly changing and posing serious questions with its myriad manifestations. In order to face this continuously evolving pandemic, we need to remain eternally vigilant. We need to adapt and find innovative solutions to counter this existential threat that we face. We need to understand that post COVID-19, we will have a new normal. COVID-19 will no doubt be an epochal marker of our times.

It is in this context that the Embassy is organizing today's event through which we seek to do two things. First, we wish to drive home this message to all our fellow Indian brothers and sisters in Kuwait that they should get themselves and their loved ones vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination is all but just the first step we need to take urgently to protect ourselves from serious illness arising out of this infection. We will still need to continue to follow all the COVID-19 related health guidelines and protocols including wearing our masks properly, maintaining adequate social distancing, following necessary hygiene etc.; remember the new normal consists of all these things in our day to day lives.

To drive home this message on importance of vaccination, the Embassy, in association with the Indian Doctors Forum (IDF) Kuwait, is launching today a dedicated COVID-19 vaccine awareness campaign. With this

campaign, we intend to reach out to each and every one of our fellow Indian brothers and sisters here in Kuwait. We have brought a booklet with COVID-19 vaccine related information in as many as 14 languages. We are grateful to all the doctors from IDF Kuwait who have authored this booklet. It is their expert comments and suggestions that constitute this booklet. In addition, I am also glad to announce that we are also launching a video campaign with messages from your doctors, again in 14 languages. This initiative, I believe, will definitely help in dispelling the many myths that people still have about COVID-19 vaccines. My request and message to all of you is simple: please follow the advice of expert medical professionals and register for vaccination.

I also urge the community to use the free multilingual tele-consultations offered by our doctors. Ask any questions, seek any advice, share your stress and strains with us, don't get panic, don't worry, and don't shy away from raising your issues with our doctors and with your embassy. Please use the twelve new WhatsApp numbers for contacting us in multiple languages. We will do everything humanly possible to address your worries and concerns.

Dear Friends,

We also have a roundtable on "COVID Plus". Many of you may be wondering what this Plus means in the context of COVID-19. Well, let me explain to you, like I mentioned earlier, COVID-19 crisis is manifesting in myriad ways and forms. With every passing day, we hear of new complications and developments related to COVID-19. There are these new health risks that we read about – Black Fungus, White Fungus and Yellow Fungus. There are media reports that the next wave of infections with newer strains of the COVID-19 virus is likely to be more harmful to young children including infants. The Plus represents these developments.

These developments sound alarming and dangerous. However, before we panic, we first need to understand these developments and assess the true risk. If there is one thing we need to learn from the challenges posed by the pandemic for over a year now; it is this based on two basic hows - How do we get out of it? And How not to get there again? This will help us in designing better preventive mechanism to deal with any evolving threat.

And who better to discern the truth or to evaluate more accurately the risks associated with these reported developments than our medical experts. I am looking forward to hearing from our expert panel of speakers today to learn more about this pandemic and its associated developments. This, I believe, will also help us to be better prepared to prevent, contain, recover and rehabilitate from the pandemic.

Dear friends,

Before I conclude, I would like to reiterate that as Ambassador of India to Kuwait, I am particularly happy to see the excellent cooperation between our two countries in the fight against Covid 19. Our doctors, nurses and other medical professionals through their hard work and sacrifice brings respect and admiration to our motherland. We continue to explore newer ways and means to further strengthen our cooperation and engagement in the healthcare sector. This morning I called on Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Kuwait His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Jaber Al Al Sabah where we discussed the ways and means to further strengthen our relations including in the fight against Covid 19 pandemic.

I once again thank you all for joining us. I urge all present here to share the link to others who could not join us today. We need the valuable discussions of our panelists and experts on Combating Covid 19 pandemic to reach every Indian national in Kuwait and all the friends of India in Kuwait.

I look forward to very fruitful discussions today.

Thank you and Good Evening.