

Remarks by Amb. Sibi George
at the
Virtual Buyer Seller Meet on Marine Products
organized by
Embassy of India, Kuwait in collaboration with MPEDA, India
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very Good Afternoon to all of you.

Let me begin by wishing you all, a very happy and healthy new year 2021!

It gives me a great pleasure, to address you all today and welcome you all to today's conference, which is our first virtual event in the new year, under the theme 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India)'. It is Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji's vision, to make India a global manufacturing hub, tapping into our abundant natural resource base, and employing our strong human resource capital.

Today we are exploring, the trade and commercial prospects, for one of India's major resources, - marine resources. With 7516 km long coastline, India is richly endowed with an abundance of marine flora and fauna. Consequently, marine products of a great quality and quantity are available for cultivation in India.

Coming from the Indian state of Kerala, where the backwaters build, a context for the large part of our geographical, social and cultural lives, and the ocean and its produce are ubiquitous, I have a great appreciation for all things marine. In Kerala, our milieu, is also defined by another phenomenon from a long time, that of, our close and continuous contact with the Arab countries.

Not just Kerala, but the entire Western coast of India, has been in close contact, with the people, on the other shore of the Arabian Sea.

For centuries, Arabian traders traversing the sea, in their sailing ships, formed a major trade and commerce connection between the east and the west. Dhows, or small sailing ships, or Booms or the large ships

from Kuwait, bringing pearls and dates from Kuwait to India, and selling it there, were instrumental in linking our two cultures. On return from India, they brought cereals and spices, and textiles and other products of everyday use. This maritime connect, has enriched India, and it has brought together the two civilizations.

India and Kuwait, are separated, only by the Arabian Sea between them, meaning that we are closest of the neighbors, and our close bilateral relationship, reflects this proximity and understanding of each other.

Our trade and commerce relationship, is robust and is growing further. India is a major source of food grains and other produce, helping ensure food security in Kuwait. Fisheries products are a major part of our bilateral trade, with India being the largest source of seafood imported into Kuwait. The major products that are imported from India include fish, notably pomfret, prawns and crabs etc. In 2019, India exported seafood worth about USD 30 Million to Kuwait. (*Through 2019-20, India shipped 1,289,651 tonnes of seafood, worth \$ 6.68 billion, compared with 1,392,559 tonnes of seafood (worth \$6.73 billion) the previous year.*)

The last year was an extraordinary year. All parts of our lives were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We went out far less often, and we did not visit restaurants as we used to do earlier. Consequently, the demand for seafood was affected globally. Even then, India exported marine products worth of about 7 billion USD and our export to Kuwait was also sizeable.

It is commendable, that the Indian seafood exporters have adopted rigorous quality standards, and SOPs to follow COVID-19 related protocols to ensure that when the product reaches our table, it only brings happiness and no anxieties with it. It is a vital requirement for the times we are in, and I am happy, that our producers and exporters ensure, that COVID-19 stays away from our plates and our homes.

As this year progresses further and hopefully demand normalizes, Indian exports will pick up, and consumers in Kuwait, and elsewhere, will be able to relish, their favorite seafood dishes.

It is thus, an ideal time, for Indian exporters and Kuwaiti importers to come together and discuss, the prospects of their trade, and make preparations for the future.

We have an impressive line of speakers joining us today. I am happy to welcome Shri K S Srinivas, Chairman of Marine Products Export Development Authority, India, whose dynamic leadership and engagement, in promoting exports of marine products from India, is helping Indian exporters to reach newer markets. I am sure, that his remarks will help you all, gain further insights in seafood industry in India, and its prospects in Kuwait.

I am happy, to welcome our guest of honor today, Dr Reem Al Fulaji, Deputy Director of Public Authority for Food and Nutrition (PAFN), State of Kuwait. As a representative of the regulating body in Kuwait, responsible for import of fisheries and related products, I am sure she will be able to share, her insights to help promote quality import from India. A detailed presentation from her colleague, Mr. Faisal Al-Rashidi, on all aspects of seafood import, from the Kuwaiti Regulator's perspective, would be of great utility, to all our participants from India today.

We also have industry representatives, from Kuwait and India, joining us today. I am sure, that the experiences of Mr. Mashal Ahmad AlJarki, Group CEO, Al-Thiqa group of companies and Mr. Alex K. Ninan, President, Seafood Exporters Association of India (SEAI), Kerala region, India will be useful, for all participants of today's conference.

I wish every success to today's conference, and hope that the participants form useful contacts with each other, and help promote the seafood trade between India and Kuwait in coming days. We, at the Embassy, particularly our Commercial Section, is always available for any help you need.

Thank you and best wishes.
