

TRANSCRIPT OF THE REMARKS BY AMB SIBI GEORGE AT THE VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE AT THE EMBASSY, MAY 26, 2021

Good Afternoon everybody,

A very warm welcome to our Open House of May 2021.

I welcome the office bearers of various associations who have joined us today; I welcome the media representatives who have joined us today.

Let me begin today's open house by thanking His Highness Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait and His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah, Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait for hosting the large Indian community in Kuwait. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Government and the people of Kuwait for the personal care and support extended to Indian community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have made 'Covid situation in India and Assistance from Abroad' as the main theme of the Open House today. Earlier this month, I had addressed the community on the evolving Covid 19 situation in India and the assistance being received from abroad. India faced the first wave of COVID-19 with very low daily numbers of infections and fatalities. The whole of society and the whole of government approach adopted by our leadership in India helped us win the fight against Covid 19 in the first phase. India, as the pharmacy of the world, supplied medicines and equipment to 154 countries and Made in India vaccines to over 70 countries including to the friendly State of Kuwait. The second wave of the pandemic has hit us badly. We are now faced with a crisis situation similar to the one some countries and many cities across the globe faced last year. I am confident that we will defeat this pandemic comprehensively in coming weeks and months.

In these difficult times, it is most heartening to see our friends across the globe coming out in support of India. As I said in many a fora before, Kuwait was one of the first countries to come forward and offer support to India. Government of Kuwait here emerged as the major supplier of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) to India. I recall that the Kuwaiti Cabinet in a meeting offered condolences and immediate support to India. An unconditional commitment of immediate assistance and support to India

was made and instructions were given to the concerned officials to mobilize all available resources and supplies needed by India. Hon'ble External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar and Kuwaiti Foreign Minister His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Ahmed Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah had a telephonic conversation where the possibility of a Sea-Bridge between Kuwait and India for regular flow of LMO and other medical supplies to India was discussed. Hon'ble EAM and His Excellency Foreign Minister of Kuwait again spoke during this period, reaffirming mutual commitment to the collective fight against COVID-19. What followed was a dedicated effort on the part of the Kuwaiti authorities to extend support to India.

The Embassy received full cooperation and support from the leadership and officials of various Ministries and public authorities such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Public Authority of Industry, Kuwait Port Authority, Kuwait Red Crescent, Civil Aviation, Ministry of Defence, Customs authorities each one of them worked hard during the Holy month of Ramadan and even during the Eid holidays to send oxygen to India. It has worked. I should also thank the various oxygen producing companies in Kuwait which I visited. They managed to arrange tankers and cylinders in short notice not only from Kuwait but other GCC countries as well.

Indian community and friends of India here also came together and led a campaign to send cylinders and tankers to India and to state governments. ICSG, IBPC, IDF, IIM and IIT alumni, ICAI, various associations of engineers, and our many professional and cultural associations and groups came forward collecting oxygen cylinders. What followed during the last three weeks were an unprecedented flow of oxygen from Kuwait to India. Two special Indian military aircrafts, four Indian Naval Ships INS Kolkata, INS Kochi, INS Tabar, and INS Shardul ensured a continuous flow of hundreds of metric tons of LMO to India. The air-sea bridge continues to be operational despite the challenges of monsoon and cyclone. Next Indian naval ship is expected to arrive on May 30.

This is the best example of what a traditional partnership of two friendly countries can do when faced with exceptional challenges which is to help each other unconditionally in times of need. A deep partnership doing wonders with Oxygen Cylinders and LMO tankers flowing to India with personal engagement of the leadership of the two countries and the

support of the vibrant Indian community in Kuwait. India and Kuwait have always stood with each other in times of difficulties.

During this period, one of the queries that I receive regularly is on the utilization of the assistance back home. Let me assure you I get daily update from the Ministry of External Affairs on the utilization of each and every assistance received from abroad. MEA regularly shares information on the delivery and usage of the oxygen cylinders and other items received from abroad. Anyone who is interested to get this information are most welcome to come over to the Embassy or contact me. We will be happy to share this information.

Dear Friends,

At the open house last month, we spoke about many issues of importance to the community: (i) Registration of Stranded Indians and their families, those who lost their jobs, those who did not get their indemnities; (ii) Free Tele consultations by our Medical Doctors from Indian Doctors Forum; (iii) Food Distribution by Indian Community Support Group (ICSG); (iv) Special Counters at the Embassy for Registration for Vaccination; (v) Vaccine Registration Campaign being undertaken by various Associations; (vi) Registration for vaccines for those without Civil IDs; (vii) Legal Assistance for those in need; (viii) Medical Assistance for those in need; and (ix) Covid 19 Awareness campaign in association with organizations like IDF.

I would like to update you on each of these issues. There is some progress on each of these issues. I continue to get a large number of mails and messages asking me when those stranded in India will be able to come to Kuwait. You recall we have launched a registration of all those stranded in India. So many stranded in India have registered with us. This include health workers with Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defence, engineers with various petrochemical companies, teachers, students and workers. I have taken up their request with the Kuwaiti authorities. Those stranded in third countries like the UAE, our Missions there have advised them to return to India.

We all are aware of the circumstances why people are stranded abroad including in India. These are extraordinary circumstances, never witnessed by many generations. A decision on the return of those stranded abroad including in India will be taken by the authorities based on their assessment of the Covid pandemic situation in Kuwait and abroad. The Embassy has

compiled and shared with the concerned authorities in Kuwait information on the stranded Indians in Kuwait, highlighting the families who are stuck in India, those who are likely to lose their jobs, those who lost their jobs, those who are to get their indemnities. I would request those who have not registered with us to register. We will cover this in detail in our presentation later during the open house.

We continue to have cases of Covid 19 positive cases in the Embassy. We continue to monitor the situation, continue to take all precautions and is continuing the public service. Our effort is to ensure that we should not close down or slow down the work of the Embassy, its community welfare activities, its consular services both at the Embassy and at the three centers in Sharq, Fahaheel and Abassia. At the same time, ICSG and our various associations and groups are ready to provide food for anyone in need. Our Embassy continue to provide daily lunch to all labourers visiting the Embassy. On the issue of medical support I thank the Indian Doctors Forum (IDF) who are continuing the Tele consultations. Please note that free Tele consultations are available in multiple languages, the numbers of doctors have been circulated. We have also launched fortnightly medical checkup for all inmates at the Embassy shelter for domestic workers in partnership with IDF. Another awareness campaign event and round table with IDF is scheduled for May 31. All are invited to join.

We regularly endeavor to improve the consular and welfare services at the Embassy. Today we are launching a new WhatsApp message contact system with the Embassy. Twelve new WhatsApp numbers are released for public to connect with the Embassy. Our endeavor is to respond to all serious queries on real-time basis during working hours. This has designated WhatsApp numbers for passport services, visa and attestation services, death cases, medical cases, labour and domestic workers issues including a special number of female domestic workers, commercial attestation, etc. It also has a one emergency WhatsApp number which will be operational after office hours. I hope this will help the Embassy to further streamline its consular and welfare services. Of course, only serious queries with full details will be replied to. Our endeavor is to receive WhatsApp messages in multiple languages. I hope this new experience will work well.

Now let me address one of the most important issues that is bothering many of us, that is the vaccinations in India and whether those vaccinated

in India can travel to Kuwait, what are the guidelines, parameters etc. I have received hundreds of queries from various associations, groups and individuals seeking clarifications from the Embassy and also requesting Embassy to take up the matter with the authorities in India and Kuwait. Many individuals were writing on behalf of thousands. This is a compilation of some of the mails that I received from many of you on this issue. Let me summarize it. There are so many questions raised: (1) whether vaccines taken in India is acceptable in Kuwait? (2) What would happen to someone who has taken a vaccine other than the one approved in Kuwait? (3) Whether the vaccination certificates issued in India is valid in Kuwait? (4) How do we get the vaccination certificates linked with passport? (5) Are we going to put a special vaccination stamp on passports? (6) Does the vaccination certificates need attestation by any authorities in India? (7) Can someone who have taken his first dose of vaccine can take the second dose in Kuwait? (8) Can those vaccinated be exempted from PCR test and quarantine?

There are so many more issues related to vaccination being raised by the community here and those stranded abroad. Let me tell you this. We are aware of all the issues involved and likely to come up when Kuwait decides to allow entry of foreigners. Each of the issues have been taken up with concerned authorities. We need to remember that many of these issues pertain to a large number of expatriates not only from India, but other countries as well. It is an issue where almost every country is currently working on the guidelines and protocol, depending on the evolving Covid situation. Issues such as the ability to verify the authenticity, validity and integrity of the certificates and whether it contains all relevant data etc. are all being addressed. The Embassy will continue to follow up each of these issues with the concerned authorities in India and Kuwait. This is an issue currently being addressed by the authorities. As and when we get more clarity and responses on the issue we will update you. We hope to shortly organize an online seminar to clarify the issues involved and also on use of various apps involved with the participation of experts including Kuwaiti lawyers and legal practitioners. In fact, we are scheduled to organize at least one seminar each month on legal and technical issues associated with the Indian expatriates in Kuwait, with participation of legal experts.

Before I conclude, let me mention about social media use here. It has been brought to my attention about some people getting into trouble due to their social media comments. In fact, I see more and more people 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, social media is something we always cherish. But with that 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 law 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, including in through use of social media. We should do nothing that would directly or indirectly hurt the social, political, religious or any other feelings and sentiments of others.

Dear Friends,

While we continue to address all concerns related to Covid 19 pandemic, we also continue our celebrations of the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations with Kuwait and also 75th anniversary of our independence, though various events virtually. Most of the Indian associations have also joined the various activities through online celebrations. We will also continue to hold business events and interaction to build our relationship with Kuwait. Our various platforms such as IBN, IPN, ICN, ISN, IRN etc. are continuing. We are launching IWN shortly. Please continue to share your suggestions and ideas to us. On June 18, we are organizing the international day of yoga in Kuwait. You would recall that we had launched an Ayush Information Cell earlier this month, inaugurated by Secretary (AYUSH). I invite all Indians in Kuwait to join us virtually at the International Yoga Day on June 18 at 10 AM.

We will now have a presentation by Shri Fahad Suri, First Secretary and Spokesperson of the Embassy on what we did during April 2021. I will be happy to get your suggestions and also answer your questions.

Thank you.