

TRANSCRIPT OF THE REMARKS BY AMB SIBI GEORGE AT THE OPEN HOUSE AT THE EMBASSY, NOVEMBER 24, 2021

Good Afternoon everybody,

A very warm welcome to you all.

We have with us on line today senior leadership of NRI Affairs from Goa Government joining us. They will explain on the various schemes available for NRIs from Government of Goa. You remember last month we had the Principal Secretary to Government of Kerala Dr. Elangovan with us. We will continue this with other State Governments also. I welcome them to this Open House.

I also welcome the office bearers of various Indian associations in Kuwait and 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.

Dear Friends,

We are meeting this Open House in a relatively better atmosphere compared to our open houses last year or even early this year. I congratulate the Leadership, Government and the people of Kuwait for handling the Covid 19 pandemic situation successfully and it's returning to near total normalcy. At the same time we need to be alert and continue to follow all Covid related precautions and guidelines. Anyone who has not taken vaccines should immediately go and take vaccines, those with or without documents. I would like to be brief today so that we can have detailed presentations and also take a few questions.

I have identified three important topics to be covered in today's Open House. (i) Passport services, I am getting regular queries on some delay in issuance of new passports. I would like to cover it in details

and give some updates. We will have a presentation on this. The pre-verification is made mandatory, so most cases are getting referred to the respective police authorities back home. My recommendation is please do not wait for last minute to submit passports, please keep renewing it at least three months before the expiry of passport or residence permit. (2) Visas: We have started issuing tourist visas to Kuwaitis. No visa is required for diplomatic and official passports. Tourist visas we are issuing on the same day or next day. I would like to have more Kuwaitis to travel to India for tourism and business. I would like each one of Indians in Kuwait to invite and persuade our Kuwaiti friends to visit India. We will issue visas on the same day. (3) The third issue is that of Covaxin. I am getting mails from India requesting me to expedite recognition of Covaxin as an approved vaccine for entry to Kuwait. I wanted to brief that this is a work in progress and that we are following up regularly with the authorities. Now that it has been recognized by WHO we are expecting a favorable decision on this. At the Embassy we have launched a registration drive to get more information on this.

We will have a detailed presentation by my colleague Dr. Vinod Gaikwad, First Secretary on the activities of the Mission and on each of the three issues that I mentioned.

Earlier this month, our community representatives in Kuwait had an interactive session with Secretary (CPV & OIA) Shri Sanjay Bhattacharya who was on a short visit to Kuwait. He also visited the passport center and the shelter. The issues raised with him included travel Restrictions from India due to less number of airline seats; high Airfare charged by many Airlines to travel from India to Kuwait; Problems faced by Indian Doctors and nurses in Kuwait on degree equalization; corruption and exploitation of Indian nurses at the Recruitment stage in India which has become a stumbling block in direct recruitment of nurses to Kuwait; Illegal channels of recruitment of domestic workers and labourers particularly in Andhra Pradesh; need for early accreditation of engineering institutions by NBA; issues faced by Chartered Accountants; and support for Special Needs

children. We will continue to follow up on these issues both in India and Kuwait.

Let me reiterate again that we have institutionalized eleven WhatsApp numbers for public to contact the Embassy team directly 24x7; please send whatsapp messages or video messages. We have also institutionalized multilingual feedback forms for all services.

I will stop here. We have a series of events planned for next week and month, starting with the Constitution Day on November 26, all are invited to join us at 10 AM at the auditorium. We also have a musical program planned at Mubarakia on December 2, as part of the 60th anniversary celebrations and then on December 5 we will start a week long program at the National Library again to celebrate the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations. All are invited to join. We will circulate more details in coming days.

I now request the representative from the Government of Goa to introduce the Schemes by Government of Goa. After his remarks my colleague Dr. Vinod Gaikwad, First Secretary will make a presentation and then I will be happy to get your suggestions and also answer your questions.

Thank you.