

**Remarks by Ambassador Sibi George
at the Diaspora Event on April 6, 2018**

**Your Excellency Dr. Andreas Baum,
Distinguished dignitaries; Panelists for the Day;
Members of the Indian Diaspora in Switzerland;
Ladies & Gentlemen, Good Evening;**

Let me start with a small experience that I had last week. I was meeting a group of students from one of the prestigious Universities in Switzerland.

One of the students asked me. Ambassador how much time one should spend in India to get a grip on the Indian culture and Indian way of life.

I thought for while about the huge task she has before her to get a grip on Indian culture, which is so vast and so diverse.

I said to get a grip on Indian culture, perhaps you need to spend a lifetime or a little more than a lifetime in India;

to get a taste of Indian culture, perhaps a years or at least a few months;

but if that is also not possible, the best option is to meet and listen to your Ambassador in New Delhi.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am happy to state that in a short span of two years His Excellency Ambassador Andreas Baum has been able to get a grip on Indian culture. Today he is one of the authorities on India in Switzerland. He has been celebrating the 70th anniversary of the signing of the India – Switzerland Friendship Treaty that we signed in 1948. Thank you Excellency.

Very rarely one sees two Ambassadors sharing a platform together. I am so happy that His Excellency has travelled all the way from India to preside over this event today in Berne. Let me congratulate and thank HE for his initiative in organizing this event today.

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For most Indians, when we hear the word Ambassador, what comes to mind is not a diplomat representing a foreign country in India or representing India abroad. What comes to their mind is our little old iconic Ambassador car.

Hardly anybody in India knew what a diplomat Ambassador actually did or whether they actually did anything. But everybody knew what an Ambassador car was all about.

Today we do not see many Ambassador Cars in Indian market.

What we see is a wide range of cars manufactured in India almost every major automobile company in the world.

Jaguar to Land Rover, BMW to Benz, Hyundai to Honda, Toyota to Suzuki, Maruti to Ford, Mahindra and Mahindra to Tata Motors, and the little smart Nano, you name it, the list is endless.

I am told that in 2017 over three million new cars were sold in India.

This transformation in the automobile industry is an example of the huge transformation that Indian economy has been witnessing in the last few years or decades. The range and the scale that India offers today in every sector offers huge opportunities for countries with high end technology like Switzerland.

I am happy to note that Switzerland is a key partner in India's economic transformation and scientific progress. Our engagement with Switzerland today is indeed multifaceted. To mention just one example, you would recall the launching of a Swiss satellite by Indian Space Research Organisation in February last year.

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At the political level, we maintain highest level of engagement with Switzerland. In the last 20 months, our Prime Minister had summit level meetings with three different Presidents of Switzerland. President HE Schneider Amman hosted him in Switzerland in July 2016, Swiss President Madam HE Doris Louthard visited India on a State visit in August 2017 and current President HE Alein Berest received Prime Minister in Davos in January 2018. These milestone visits imparted fresh momentum to our deep-rooted and multi-faceted cooperation. The leadership has spoken loud and clear. It is for us to follow up and implement their decisions.

His Excellency spoke about our economic engagement. Besides our political exchanges, business engagement and our manifold official

interactions, people-to-people contacts and initiatives by the private sector are energizing cooperation in various sectors.

Switzerland today is a household name in India. Thanks to the Bollywood which spent considerable time shooting in Berne Oberland, not far from here. It has influenced Indian mind so much that when we see snow in films, we think it is Switzerland.

Excellency, Switzerland is not famous just for its beauty and snow. I am sure that what makes you proud as a diplomat abroad is 'Swiss quality'. Whether it is Swiss chocolate, or Swiss cheese, or Swiss watches or the high end technology products, Swiss quality is a symbol of reliability. This Swiss quality is something which makes each Swiss proud of his country, which makes every Swiss Ambassador abroad proud. I was at Schindler Elevators at Lucern yesterday, visiting its HQs, its factory and R&D center.

Excellency, like the Swiss quality that makes you proud when you represent your country abroad, there are several factors that makes an Indian Ambassador proud, representing his country abroad. Its civilization, its culture, its diversity, its democratic polity and society, its economic transformation, its scientific progress, its profile as symbol of peace and non-violence, its yoga, its spirituality, its Ayurveda, again the list is endless.

But there is one element that stands out which makes every Indian Ambassador and every Indian, 1.3 billion Indians proud. That is the quality and the contributions of Indian Diaspora abroad.

You explore any positive field of activity anywhere in the world today, scientists, professors, artists, students, doctors, engineers you find Indians in key positions and contributing to the progress of the country where they live. At the same time not forgetting about their routes.

During the last four months, I have been travelling all across Switzerland meeting people, visiting cantons, universities, companies. Earlier this week I was at Basal visiting Novartis HQs, met its new CEO, who is proud of his Indian origin. In every university that I visited here I met Indian professors and Indian students. I am happy to see how first generation, second generation and third generation Indians contribute in the progress of the country where they live and also build bridges at every field of engagement.

Indian Diaspora in Switzerland, like anywhere else in the world, comes from different parts of India, they speak different languages, they worship different Gods, they listen to different music, they enjoy different dance forms, they eat different foods, and they wear different kinds of clothes. But there is a feeling of oneness and the common consciousness, an Indianness that keeps them together and help celebrate and promote their diverse culture and traditions abroad.

I am happy to note that in the last few months our Embassy in Berne has a few initiatives in deepening our engagement. We have set up an Indian Professionals Network and an Indian Cultural Network. I urge you to participate in its activities. We have put together a programme, MISSP, to support small and medium companies to engage more deeply with India.

In this 70th anniversary year we plan to organize a series of events that will highlight the cultural and traditional ties that bind us. I invite you all to be partners with the Embassy.

To begin with save dates for two major events our YOGA day celebrations in June and our Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations in Varanasi in January 2019. The plan is also participate the famous Khumbh Mela in Allahabad and Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. It is worth attending. We will send you the details. Also keep in touch through facebook, twitter and our website.

Excellency, ladies and gentlemen thank you.

Berne
April 6, 2018

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