

Ambassador's Message on the occasion of 66th Republic Day of India

On the occasion of the 66th Republic Day of India, I extend my warm greetings and congratulations to all my fellow countrymen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. On this day, in 1950, the modern India was born, and a resilient and forward looking constitution was adopted by our founding fathers, who resolved that the constitution protects the rights of all Indians, guarantees equality before law, encourages pluralist ethos, advocates tolerance and non-violence, and promotes goodwill among diverse communities. These everlasting noble and just values of our Constitution made it more relevant in today's world and have secured a unique and revered place for India in the comity of nations.

India is now emerging as the land of immense possibilities and unlimited opportunities. The government has set accelerating national economic development and ease in doing business its primary goals; placing equal emphasis on enhancing knowledge, skill, technology, innovation and research & development. This will ultimately contribute to enhancing employment opportunities, improving social and economic condition including quality of life. Landmark success of Mars Orbit Mission (MOM), India's maiden mission to Mars has made India the only country to reach Mars on its first attempt, and its being fully manufactured indigenously at a relatively small cost, stands testimony to the robust technology infrastructure and expertise established in the country. Few months back, the Government launched 'Make in India' initiative to encourage the growth of manufacturing in the country and transform India into a global manufacturing hub. The Government is also striving to strengthen investor confidence by creating a policy environment which is transparent and fair, changing the work culture and ensuring the delivery systems. In the process, it has further liberalized FDI policy in the sectors of construction, railways, insurance, defence and manufacturing medical devices. This has given a fillip to India's position as a preferred destination for foreign investors and India has attracted Foreign Direct Investment worth USD 17.35 billion during April to October 2014 showing an increase of 26% as compared to similar period in previous year.

India and Saudi Arabia enjoy excellent relations reflecting the centuries old economic and socio-cultural interactions. After India's independence in 1947, the diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1948. The two countries have been engaged at the highest levels since then and have established several institutionalised mechanisms of cooperation in political, economic, security and defence sectors. I note with satisfaction that the Indian community here has been steadily contributing to the all round development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and have become 'the most preferred expatriate community' because of their law abiding and peace loving nature.

Indo-Saudi economic relations have shown remarkable growth with bilateral trade registering three-fold increase in the last five years. Saudi Arabia is the 4th largest trade partner of India with total revenue at USD 48.62 billion in 2013-14. The figures in the current financial year are no less impressive so far with bilateral trade around USD 30

billion from April-November 2014. Saudi Arabia is the 4th largest market with more than 4.11% of India's global exports; Saudi Arabia is the source of 6.71% of India's global imports. For Saudi Arabia as per data available, India is the 5th largest market for its exports, accounting for 9.26% of its global exports and around 3.46% of Saudi Arabia's total imports. The import of crude oil by India forms a major component of bilateral trade with Saudi Arabia being India's largest supplier of crude oil, accounting for almost one-fifth of its needs. Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas Shri Dharmendra Pradhan visited Kingdom for the 2nd bilateral energy consultations in Riyadh in October 2014 and also held a bilateral meeting with Saudi Petroleum and Mineral Resource Minister Eng. Ali bin Ibrahim Al-Naimi. There are Indian projects in diverse sectors such as management and consultancy services, construction projects, telecommunications, information technology, pharmaceuticals, etc. Several Indian companies have also established collaborations with Saudi companies and are working in the Kingdom in the areas of designing, consultancy, financial services and software development.

Today, the leadership and people of Saudi Arabia are deeply grief-ridden on the sad demise of the beloved leader King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz who enjoyed a great respect in the international community as a seasoned statesman, a progressive reformer and a great visionary leader. We, in India, found in King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz a great friend and well-wisher. Whose landmark visit to India in 2006 as the Chief Guest of our Republic Day celebrations saw the signing of 'Delhi Declaration' which imparted fresh impetus to our bilateral relationship and laid down a strong foundation for cooperation in the fields of mutual interest. The 'Riyadh Declaration' in 2010 raised the level of our bilateral engagement to a 'Strategic Partnership' further enhancing cooperation in diverse fields. We join our Saudi brethren in this hour of grief and sorrow. Hon'ble President of India and Prime Minister both have conveyed their sincere condolences on the sad demise of His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Hon'ble Vice President of India accompanied by Hon'ble Minister of State Mr. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Hon'ble Member of Parliament Mr. Gulam Nabi Azad and Mr. M.J. Akbar arrived in Riyadh on January 24, 2015 and paid condolences to the Saudi leadership on behalf of the Government and people of India. I, on behalf of my countrymen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and on my personal behalf, offer my deepest condolences to the leadership and the people of Saudi Arabia.

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, a well known senior statesman with vast knowledge and deep understanding of the World affairs, has earned significant trust and respect in the world. His Majesty King Salman is a close friend and admirer of India. As Crown Prince, he visited New Delhi in February 2014 and met the entire leadership of India. The visit culminated in signing of a MoU on Defence Cooperation between the two countries. Earlier, in April 2010, as Governor of Riyadh province, His Majesty led a high level business delegation to New Delhi and Mumbai. In November 2014, on the sidelines of G20 meeting in Brisbane, Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi met with His Majesty King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who congratulated the Prime Minister for assuming his charge and stressed on deepening of bilateral relations between the two countries. I extend my sincere felicitations to the King and wish him all success in his noble mission. I am confident

that the coming months will witness further efforts and bilateral exchanges to strengthen our commercial and security relationship which forms intrinsic part of our strategic partnership.

I take this opportunity, once again, to greet my fellow citizens in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on this occasion of the 66th Republic Day of India.

January 26, 2015