

**Speech by H.E. Mr. Vinod K Jacob, Ambassador of India to the Kingdom of Bahrain at inaugural of event on “Focusing on Bilateral Investments” organized by Bahrain India Society (BIS) in coordination with the Embassy of India, Bahrain on 9 October 2024 at Crowne Plaza, Manama**

Your Excellency, Mr. Abdulla bin Adel Fakhro, Minister of Industry & Commerce, Kingdom of Bahrain, Your Excellency, Mr. Jamal Fakhro, Managing Partner, KPMG, Mr. Abdulrahman Juma, Chairman of Bahrain India Society, Ms. Dalal Buhejji, Executive Director, Business Development, EDB, Mr. B. Prasanna, Group Head, Global Markets, ICICI Bank, Mr. Sanjay Vasudev, Director, Zamil Private Office, Mr. CA Balasubramanyam, Vice Chairman of BIS, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to attend today’s event on “Focusing on Bilateral Investments” organized by Bahrain India Society (BIS) in coordination with the Embassy of India, Bahrain. The theme of the panel discussion is topical and highly relevant and the discussants are eminently qualified to enlighten us on the current landscape and the future possibilities for two-way investments between India and Bahrain.

As you all know, India-Bahrain bilateral relationship is very close and forward looking. It is guided by the consensus reached by the leadership on both sides. 2024 is a significant milestone in bilateral relations. It marks the tenth anniversary of the state visit of His Majesty, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa to India and also the fifth anniversary of the state visit of Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Narendra Modi to Bahrain in 2019.

In terms of investments, there has been a 40 percent increase in two-way investments since 2019 with the cumulative currently standing at more than USD 1.62 billion. When we look at the latest data provided by the Government of Bahrain, Indian investments during the one year period 2023 Q2 to 2024 Q2 was USD 265 million. This represents a substantial increase from the one year period 2023 Q1 to 2024 Q1 when Indian investment was of the order of USD 200 million.

It is also pertinent to mention that in the recent past, highly reputed Indian brands have decided to establish a presence in Bahraini market or elevate the already existing engagement.

I would refer in this regard to the Taj Brand through the proposed two properties in partnership with Kingdom Projects. Second, we had the setting up of the first Bikanervala outlet in Bahrain with its expertise in sweets and savouries. Third, I would refer to the Apollo brand with its collaboration with Bahrain Specialist Hospital. And fourth, the LuLu Group opened its 11th hypermarket in November last year and I am given to understand they plan to add another soon.

When we turn to trade, according to statistics from the Department of Commerce of the Government of India, for the period April 2023 to March 2024, two way trade reached US\$ 1.73 billion. The trade gap was a marginal US\$ 80 million, down from US\$ 146.61 million in 2021-22.

India's main export items to Bahrain were: engineering goods with US\$ 201.7 million, electronic goods with US\$ 157.3 million and petroleum products with US\$ 105.3 million followed by gems and jewellery with US\$ 93.4 million and then rice with US\$ 60 million and meat, dairy and poultry products with US\$ 51.7 million. Interestingly, while India exported petroleum products worth US\$ 105.3 million, we imported petroleum products worth US\$ 102.59 million from Bahrain.

I am also happy to note that tourism flows from India into Bahrain have increased by 44 percent in the most recent one year period for which data is available, going from 736,510 in 2022 to 1,059,371 in 2023.

### **Friends,**

Before I conclude, let me highlight two recent opportunities provided by the Indian Government's economic diplomacy.

First, I draw your attention to ONDC or Open Network for Digital Commerce which aims to create an inclusive ecosystem for e-commerce. ONDC's mission is to dramatically increase e-commerce penetration in India by enabling population-scale inclusion of all types and sizes of sellers.

Second, I draw your attention to BHARAT TEX 2025 scheduled to take place in India in February next year. Bharat Tex-2025 will focus on transforming the textile industry into a futuristic domain of growth and development, with pavilions dedicated to sustainability, circularity, and digitization.

In my view, these positive trends and developments augur well for a bright future for commercial and economic engagement between India and Bahrain. My Embassy will continue to play our due role in this regard. Once again I wish this event all success and look forward to the panel discussion.

I thank you all.