

Remarks of H.E. Mr. Vinod K Jacob, Ambassador of India at the ITEC Day celebrations in Bahrain, 16 November 2023

I am honoured to receive so many friends of India who are all strong supporters of India-Bahrain relations. At the outset, let me acknowledge the valuable contributions of H.E. Mr. Abdulnabi Al Shoala, former Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Member of the Shura (Consultative) Council and its Executive Committee and also the author of a fascinating book on Mahatma Gandhi and his close relations with the Arab world. We have with us Mr. Abdul Hassan Al Dairi, Chairman of the SMEs Society and who is a steadfast votary of bilateral relations.

Since this is my first ITEC Day and Alumni celebrations after becoming Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain, I would like to acknowledge the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Awardees who have made their own important contributions towards friendship between the two countries, namely, Mr. Radhakrishnan Pillai, Mr. Rajashekhar Pillai, Mr. Ravi Pillai, Mr. Varghese Kurian, Mr. Soman Baby and Mr. KG Baburajan. I take this opportunity to thank them for their support and appreciate their work.

I also thank the Alumni of Indian Universities and the ITEC alumni for today's participation. It is people like you who are at the forefront of keeping the centuries long ties between our two societies going forward in the contemporary context. I am happy to share with you that Indians have reciprocated your kindness by flocking in large numbers to this friendly country as tourists. According to Bahraini data, during the period January to September 2023, almost 800,000 Indians visited Bahrain, representing a nearly 60 percent increase over the corresponding period last year.

Friends,

India used to be a preferred education destination for generations of Bahrainis. With the New Education Policy of India and the growth of world class educational infrastructure, highly updated courses, competitive costs, geographical proximity and cultural similarities, contemporary India offers a lot for students wishing to pursue higher education in India. In this month itself, two education fairs are being organized-one of which I inaugurated earlier today and another which will take place on 24 November. I would encourage all of you to visit the fairs.

In my view, ITEC offers a unique platform for bilateral cooperation in the sphere of capacity building at a time when the Kingdom is placing high emphasis on skilling its youth and Government employees. Please continue to support this useful platform.

I would be remiss if I did not share with you a new initiative we have started of promoting a specific state or union territory of India every month. Last month it was Rajasthan and this month it is Jammu and Kashmir. We have created a One District One Product wall in the Embassy to focus our attention by highlighting tourist attractions and the exquisite products of Jammu and Kashmir. In this regard, I am happy to say that a record number of 16.2 million tourists visited Kashmir in 2022. Last year, a business delegation led by Mr. Abdul Hassan Al Dairi, Chairman of the SMEs visited Kashmir and signed an MoU with the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In conclusion, let me state that India is a growth opportunity for Bahrain and it would be in the mutual interests of both sides to benefit from the India growth story and Bahrain's strategic location and other advantages. I look forward to working with all of you in this regard.

Thank you.