Speech of H.E. Mr. N. Ram Prasad, High Commissioner of India for the Reception at the 75th Republic Day of India – 26 Jan 2024

Namaskar/Good Evening/Sanibonaani

His Majesty King Mswati-III Representative His Royal Highness Prince Sicalo, Hon'ble Acting Prime Minister, Hon'ble Ministers, Dignitaries from various Government Departments, colleagues of the Diplomatic Corps, Diaspora friends, ladies and gentlemen.

2. It is my honour and privilege to welcome you all and thank you for being part of India's 75th Republic Day celebrations. I take this opportunity to brief you on the state of play of India-Eswatini bilateral relations.

3. India's leadership of G20 was the hallmark of various achievements of India since we celebrated our Republic Day last year. The Kingdom of Eswatini partnered with India during the India's Chairmanship of G20. H.E.Ms. Jane Mkhonta, Hon'ble Minister of Tourism & Environmental Affairs of the Kingdom of Eswatini participated in the Ministerial session of the Environment Ministers pertaining to the 2nd Voice of Global South Summit 2023 held virtually in November last year. Dr. Simon Zwane, Principal Secretary, Ministry of Health of the Kingdom of Eswatini represented the Hon'ble Minister of Health in January last year at the 1st Voice of Global South Summit.

4. At the invitation of the Chief Justice of India, His Lordship Bheki Maphalala, Chief Justice of the Kingdom of Eswatini visited India in November last year to participate at the 1st Regional Conference on Access to Legal Aid: Strengthening Access to Justice on the Global South.

5. Senior officers from the Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force (UEDF) took part in the Africa-India Defence Exercises and the AFINDEX. A senior officer from the Ministry of Defence also visited the Aero India 2023.

6. While Diplomatic and official passport holders of both countries already enjoy visa-free travel, last year we also extended the facility to service passport holders of the Kingdom.

7. India has extended following lines of credit to the Kingdom:

(i) USD 37.9 million under the Agriculture Development and Mechanisation project which resulted in a six-fold increase in maize productivity;

(ii) USD 20 million for completion of the Royal Science & Technology Park;

(iii) US$ 10.4 million for disaster recovery site for National Data Center by RSTP; Consultant for the same has been appointed.

(iv) US$ 108.24 billion for the new Parliament Building project; Consultant for the project has already been appointed and it is expected that the project would be completed at the earliest.

8. Since the establishment of the High Commission of India in the Kingdom of Eswatini in August 2019, four major cultural delegations from Eswatini to India were sponsored. A Manipuri Dance troupe from India performed at the Royal Palace for His Majesty and the Royal family. Scholarships are being offered for Emaswati youth to learn Indian dance and music. We are sponsoring the India visit of a 20-member strong handicraft/cultural/business delegation of Eswatini in the first week of February this year for the upcoming Surajkund Mela. I hope this would

encourage them to make use of the opportunities available at the fair to establish contacts and further business prospects.

9. High Commission of India has sponsored about 100 fully paid scholarships to Emaswati under the Africa Scholarship Scheme of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in the last four years. This number is going to grow and more and more Emaswati are going to obtain higher education in various prestigious universities and colleges of India.

10. More than 300 Emaswati government officials have benefitted from the capacity building opportunities under the ITEC programme of the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India.

11. Our defence cooperation is also growing with the high-level visits of His Royal Highness Prince Sicalo and the Eswatini Army Commander to India in 2022. I am happy to note that the Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force is now actively engaged to fully utilize the defence training opportunities available during the Training Year 2023-24 and look forward to their keen interest in the abundant training opportunities available in the forthcoming 2024-25 Training Year also.

12. We have also established two India Corners at the National Libraries in Mbabane and Manzini and mini-India Corners in all parts of the Kingdom at various educational institutions like the University of Eswatini, Waterford Kamhlaba High School, and various High Schools in Matsanjeni, Siteki and Mbabane.

13. Next India-Eswatini Foreign Office Consultations are expected to be held in the very near future. We have also been informed that the Kingdom is planning to open its resident Mission in India at the earliest.

14. India has offered thousands of generic drugs with WHO standards to Eswatini at very nominal price under the Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP). We have offered introduction of Indian Pharmacopoeia, which would immensely benefit Eswatini to tide over the scarcity of basic medicines and medical equipment. We have offered to set up a Jaipur Foot Camp in Eswatini free of cost, which would help enable more than 500 differently abled Emaswati to have custom-made artificial limbs at no cost, which would enable them lead a near-normal life. We hope to convene the Joint Working Group of India and Eswatini in the health sector at an early date.

15. The draft Framework Agreement for the joining International Solar Alliance (ISA) was signed by the Kingdom of Eswatini on 03 February 2021 and we hope the Parliament of Eswatini would ratify the same at the earliest. This would enable the Kingdom make large strides towards energy security.

16. The more than 2,000 India diaspora community is a major contributor to the economy and promotes people to people contacts with the Kingdom of Eswatini. I wish to thank His Majesty for taking care of the welfare of our Nationals.

17. Finally, I would like to thank His Majesty King Mswati III, Hon'ble Ministers, senior Government Officials, diplomatic colleagues and friends for honoring us by attending our Independence Day Reception this evening. We look forward to our continued engagement for the mutual benefit of both of our friendly countries and the wellbeing of our people.