Speech of H.E. Mr. N. Ram Prasad, High Commissioner of India for the Reception at the 76th Republic Day of India – 26 Jan 2025

Namaskar/Good Evening/Sanibonaani

His Majesty King Mswati-III Representative His Royal Highness Prince Sicalo 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 76th Republic Day celebrations. As we celebrate 75 years of India's constitution as also 55 years of India-Eswatini diplomatic relations, I take this opportunity to walk you through major events in our bilateral relations that took place over the last year.

3. India's leadership of the Global South 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 leadership of the Voice of Global South Summit. H.E.Mr.Neal Rijkenberg, Hon'ble Minister of Finance of the Kingdom of Eswatini participated in the Ministerial session of the Finance Ministers pertaining to the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit 2024 held virtually in August last year. H.E.Dr.Tambo Gina, Hon'ble Minister of Economic Planning & Development visited India for the CII-Africa Business summit in August last year.

4. The Foreign Office Consultations were held after a gap of 7 years in which a clear roadmap for bilateral partnership was identified. Last year also marked various firsts notably, the first meeting of the Joint Working Group on Health, the first time India participated in the Eswatini International Trade Fair, the first Indian Film festival in

Eswatini. We also participated in the Mbabane International Day and supported Eswatini's hosting of the SACU/SADC games through sponsorship of sports equipment and apparel. The lease deed for the gift of a plot of land for construction of the High Commission building was signed. We are indeed thankful to His Majesty for the generous gift.

5. This year too, as in the previous years, High Commission is sponsoring the India visit of a 20-member handicraft/cultural/business delegation of Eswatini in the first week of February 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. As per the bilateral trade treaty, India has offered Most Favoured Nation status to the Kingdom of Eswatini and we hope that this would enable foster bilateral trade.

6. India sponsored 30 fully paid scholarships to Emaswati under the Africa Scholarship Scheme of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) last year for higher education in various prestigious universities and colleges of India. Also 50 fully paid scholarships were awarded under the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation scheme of the Government of India. India also brought the latest cutting edge technology courses in Artificial Intelligence, Data Science etc. to the very doorstep of the Kingdom through the Zanzibar campus of the Indian Institute of Technology.

7. Our defence cooperation is also growing with the Umbutfo Eswatini Defence Force now fully utilizing the 15 defence training slots during the Training Year 2024-25 and look forward to their keen interest in the abundant training opportunities available in the forthcoming 2025-26 Training Year also. A delegation from Eswatini is also scheduled to visit India for the Aero India Defence Expo.

8. The draft Framework Agreement for 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.

9. The Kingdom of Eswatini also supported the candidatures of India to various UN and International bodies and we are grateful for their support.

10. We understand that Eswatini is planning to open its resident Mission in India at the earliest and welcome the same. We have already assured all possible help to the Eswatini side to facilitate the same and hope for its early opening.

11. While Diplomatic and official and service passport holders of both countries already enjoy visa-free travel, India has also extended the facility of e-visa to Emaswati holding regular passports. We hope that Eswatini too, on the principle of reciprocity, would extend the same facility to Indian tourists and businessmen to enable them visit this beautiful country.

11. 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.

12. Finally, I would like to thank everyone for honoring us by attending our Republic Day Reception this evening. We look forward to our continued engagement for the mutual benefit of both of our friendly countries and the well-being of our people.