

Remarks by Amb Sibi George at the Virtual Conference on Indian Automobiles, with special focus on Electric Vehicles - Aatmanirbhar Bharat Series of events - in Kuwait, Nov 25, 2020

Shri. K.R. Jyotilal, IAS, Principal Secretary, GAD, Aviation, Metro Transport and Revenue, Government of Kerala,

Shri. Mahesh Desai, Chairman, Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC) India

Senior Officials from EEPC and Invest India,

Esteemed Participants from India and Kuwait,

Distinguished Businessmen from India and Kuwait,

Distinguished Guests from the Media Community in Kuwait,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very Good Morning to all of you,

It gives me a great pleasure to address you all today and welcome you all to today's conference, which is our fifth event in Kuwait under the theme 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India)'. I am happy that the Indian Business Network (IBN) that we set up recently, in collaboration with the Commerce Wing of the Embassy, is coming up with a series of events such as this one today. I am delighted to know that we have seen tremendous response from the business communities of India and Kuwait to all our earlier events, which were sectorally focused covering key sectors like Agriculture and Allied sector, Pharmaceuticals sector, and Textiles sector.

Today, we are bringing to you all yet another important sector – the automobiles sector with a special focus on electric vehicles. The Auto sector is a key component of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative, which was a clarion call given by Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi. This initiative envisages a merger of the local with the global; an idea that ensures India's strengths act as a global force multiplier.

COVID-19 has been a major global disruptor of health, human lives, livelihoods and economies; and whilst humanity as a whole continues to grapple with this challenge of unprecedented proportions, it is important to

remember that crisis situations often bring about the best in people. Even during the current crisis, we have witnessed remarkable stories of the triumph of the human spirit – be it the frontline healthcare workers battling it out and saving lives, the airline staff and crew taking home people stranded in far flung countries away from their near and dear ones, researchers and scientists at leading laboratories racing against time to develop an effective vaccine, the supply chain logistics network ensuring continuous supply of daily essentials, including food and medicine, and the business enterprises who are making sure that production and supply lines of goods and commodities are not hampered.

In fact, in this moment of crisis it is all the more essential that our entrepreneurial talent develops solutions to not only manage and overcome the current pandemic triggered crisis but also to turn this crisis into an opportunity to spur growth through innovation, strategic review and rebalancing. In this context, I am quite happy to recount a phenomenal success story that unfolded recently in India. As of February 2020, India was an importer of PPE kits, and had no manufacturing capability. When COVID-19 struck, India was only able to import around 52,000 kits for its frontline healthcare workers due to a supply crisis. In a matter of few months, India became not just the world's second largest manufacturer of PPE kits now, but also developed the world's first reusable PPE suit.

The ability to adapt and innovate lies at the heart of this success story. And the same innovative spirit is driving India's auto sector, which is a pivotal pillar of India's economy. My generation of Indians present here would recall that for most Indians, when we hear the word Ambassador, what comes to mind is not this Ambassador, not a diplomat representing a foreign country in India or representing India abroad. What comes to their mind is our little old iconic Ambassador car. Today we do not see many Ambassador Cars in Indian market.

What we see is a wide range of cars manufactured in India almost every major automobile company in the world. Jaguar to Land Rover, BMW to Benz, Hyundai to Honda, Toyota to Suzuki, Maruti to Ford, Mahindra and Mahindra to Tata Motors, and the little smart Nano, you name it, the list is endless. This transformation in the automobile industry is an example of the

huge transformation that Indian economy has been witnessing in the last few years or decades.

I am told that there are two vintage Indian Ambassador Cars plying in the roads of Kuwait these days. One of the small things that I plan to do one of these days is to organize a car rally of Indians vehicles in Kuwait led by these two Ambassador cars as part of the celebrations to mark the 75th anniversary of India's independence day and 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait that we celebrate next year.

Dear Friends,

India's progress in automobile sector has been rapid. India is currently the world's largest tractor manufacturer, largest heavy trucks manufacturer, largest two-wheeler and three-wheeler manufacturer, second largest bus manufacturer, third largest heavy truck manufacturer and fourth largest car manufacturer. With India's economy projected to remain one of the fastest growing economy for the foreseeable future, especially with our massive infrastructural growth plans to building hundreds of smart cities, build roads, airports, rail lines and ports, rationalize supply chains and warehouse networks, the pace of this growth will only grow further. India is expected to be the world's third-largest automotive market in terms of volume by 2026. Autosector has also been a major recipient of foreign direct investments attracting \$24.5 bn FDI during 2000 to 2020.

Innovation will also be the key driver towards making India a leader in environment-friendly technology for cars. Laying a roadmap for the future of India's mobility, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi has said and I quote "My vision for the future of mobility in India is based on 7 Cs — common, connected, convenient, congestion-free, charged, clean, cutting-edge. We want to drive investments across the value chain from batteries to smart charging to electric vehicle manufacturing. India's entrepreneurs and manufacturers are now poised to develop and deploy break-through battery technology." Unquote.

Development of the Electric Vehicles segment is a key priority for the Government as it complements India's investments and commitment towards renewable energy. It is part of our commitment to our heritage, our

fight against climate change and our gift to the future generations. This strong commitment coupled by requisite policy initiatives by the government has resulted in electric vehicles segment witnessing tremendous growth in India. EV sales, excluding e-rickshaws, registered a staggering annual growth of 20 per cent in 2019-20.

As we showcase Indian auto industry and the EV roadmap in India to our Kuwaiti friends, it is pertinent to highlight that the relationship between India and Kuwait is historical and age old. Our close bilateral relations are strongly anchored in civilizational linkages and nurtured by vibrant people-to-people contacts. And, trade/commerce has been an important pillar of this multifaceted relationship; India has consistently been among the top trading partners of Kuwait. Indian brands like Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland, Maruti, Mahindra, and so on, are well known and the exceptional quality of Indian products are well acknowledged not only in the Kuwaiti market but also across the globe. However, the full potential of the extremely close bilateral relationship remains to be realized; especially in the domain of automobiles.

This event is therefore an effort to strengthen the existing trade linkages, provide a platform to businesses to explore newer avenues for cooperation and to forge a special partnership in auto sector especially in the next generation EV segment. I look forward to work closely with all of you to make this engagement and our subsequent engagements a fruitful one and provide a mutually beneficial platform.

We have a lineup of important speakers from India and Kuwait including my dear batch mate Shri K. R. Jyotilal IAS, Principal Secretary of Transport of Government of Kerala, who is spearheading an electric vehicle revolution in Kerala. I am also happy to see Shri Mahesh Desai, Chairman, Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC) India, one of the most active Export Promotion Councils in India. I once again welcome all the speakers and participants at today's event.

I wish a very fruitful interactive session today.

Thank you.