Introduction of Mr. **Vikram Singh Mehta**, Chairman and Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) & Former Chairman, Shell Group of Companies in India, by Mr. **Bharat Doshi** on the occasion of the Twenty-Eighth Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture on 15 December 2022

Good evening friends,

It is my privilege and honour this evening to introduce Mr Vikram Singh Mehta, on the occasion of the 28th Lalit Doshi Memorial Lecture.

One more star will join this evening in the galaxy of speakers who have delivered the previous 27 lectures.

I have known Mr. Vikram Mehta for many years and, at one stage, we were colleagues on the board of directors of Mahindra & Mahindra Limited. Since then we have remained friends, and of recently we came closer to each other over several lunches in the context of today's lecture, and in the context of my desire to learn about him beyond the biodata published in the invitation card.

Vikram, therefore with your permission, I will take the liberty to switch between Mr. Vikram Mehta and just Vikram as appropriate.

Vikram, I was hoping that your wife Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, reputed in her own right, and well known for her immense contribution as Honorary Director of Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, would have been present here today. Unfortunately, prior commitments have kept her away but I am pleased that Vikram's young entrepreneur daughter, Ahilya is present with us. At this stage, I would like to mention that in January 1994,

when Lalit passed away, Tasneem's father, Dr. Rafiq Zakaria, then a cabinet minister in Maharashtra was the first to pay his homage to Lalit in a letter to the editor of Times of India. An extract from the letter is published in the Foundation's brochure distributed today. *

Vikram comes from a family with a tradition of government service. His grandfather, Mohan Singh Mehta was the Diwan of the princely state of Udaipur and later he served as India's High Commissioner to Pakistan and was also a member of the Constituent Assembly. Vikram's father, Jagat Singh Mehta retired as a Foreign Secretary in 1979 and his mother Mrs. Rama Mehta was the first woman in the Indian Foreign Service but she had to quit due to the then rigid government rule of not allowing spouses to serve IFS together.

Mr Vikram Singh Mehta graduated with honours degree in mathematics from St Stephens College, Delhi University. Subsequently, he obtained *dual* post-graduation degrees in Economics and in particular ***energy*** economics from Magdalen College, Oxford University followed by Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. His post graduate thesis was on oil & barter trade in the aftermath of the first oil crisis in the 1970s.

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* *Extract from Dr. Rafiq Zakaria's letter to the Editor, The Times of India.*

> *"In the sudden, premature death of Mr. Lalit Doshi, India has lost one of its finest civil servants. I came in contact with him at different levels and found him not only competent and hardworking, but also honest and incorruptible. Unassuming and quiet, he had a helpful nature. He was one of the few officers who was both loved and respected. Had he not been so suddenly snatched away in the prime of life, I am sure he would have risen to the position of cabinet secretary".*

I came across some interesting stories about Vikram and his Oxford mates, Imran Khan and Benazir Bhutto, but those will have to wait for some other day.

Vikram qualified in the civil services exam and was eligible for the IFS but chose to stay back and served as an IAS probationer for 19 months till he had a sudden change of thought about his career perspective and decided to quit the IAS.

Vikram joined Philips Petroleum in London as their Senior Economist and he has been an oil man ever since whether outside or inside the government.

The passion for public service flowing in his blood, led Vikram to return to India in 1984 to join the public sector oil company 'Oil India Ltd' and the Ministry of Petroleum as its Advisor (Strategic Planning).

He resigned from Oil India in 1988 and joined Shell International in London. In 1991, he was posted as the Managing Director for Shell Markets and Chemicals, Egypt.

The year 1994, when Vikram was asked to head Shell's India operations it was a very interesting time for India. Economic reforms meant that the market was more dynamic than ever, and the global energy giants' entry was widely seen as a game changer.

While heading Shell India, an arm of the multinational, Vikram was still invited to join various committees of the government to shape national energy policy and I heard from many sources that Vikram was always very objective, wanted a fair and effective policy and was not somebody who would just push a multinational's agenda.

Vikram was executive chairman of Brookings India and is presently Chairman and Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress. He serves as a non-executive Independent Director on several companies board. He was a member of the Board of Governors of the Pandit Deendayal University of Petroleum.

Vikram is a regular and reputed columnist in Indian Express and Financial Express since 1997. While focus of his articles has been on oil, natural gas and energy, he also writes on varied topics covering climate change, sustainability, agenda for development and governance. Believe me, he always conveys a crystal-clear view which could sometimes be debated but could never be ignored.

As a constant seeker of knowledge, Vikram maintains not ***one***, but ***three*** personal libraries one each in Delhi, Mumbai and Udaipur. Vikram says his interest in reading is less about books on business and more about economic and political history, religion, and philosophy.

Vikram, my search on the Net further led me to a reference to Tasneem, in an interview, having responded to a question about you and she said that she was charmed by your Oxford accent and your disarming intellectual air. Vikram, I wish Tasneem was present here so that I could have confirmed this quote directly with her. However, friends, I must mention that when I checked with Vikram, he did not deny it.

I must mention Vikram's books. He is one of the editors of the book "*Anchoring Change*", covering 75 years of grassroot intervention that made a difference.

He is also the editor of the book *The Next Stop: Natural Gas and India's Journey to a Clean Energy Future* (2021), a comprehensive volume which spans global and national dimensions. I could have quoted from this book and from several of Vikram's articles about his thoughts on energy, sustainability, and climate change. But that would have meant pre-empting a part of his speech today.

When I met him two weeks ago, he showed me some beautiful photographs of his home in the lap of Kumaon Hills with a beautiful view of the Himalayas. He said that during this retreat in Binsar sanctuary, he put flesh and blood to his thoughts on what he is going to speak today.

I realise that I have mainly emphasized and underlined Vikram's credentials to speak on energy and only passingly referred to many other aspects of his multifaceted personality just due to paucity of time.

Vikram, we now look forward to an intellectual treat in "your Oxford accent", as we await your talk on "*Energy Aatmanirbharta - Meeting Emergent Challenges*"**.**

Thank you.