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Saudi King's Visit to India

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, centre, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, left, and President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan New Delhi, where he was formally welcomed on January 25.

Heralding "a new era" in bilateral ties that ends decades of mutual political neglect, India and Saudi Arabia on January 27 signed a landmark declaration that envisages active cooperation in combating terrorism, a strategic energy partnership and dealing with regional issues from a broader global perspective.

The Delhi Declaration, signed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, puts an official seal on what they term is the development of a "broad strategic vision" in India-Saudi relations which will not only empower each other but prove to be a keystone of stability in the Gulf and the region.

King Abdullah's visit, the first by a Saudi monarch in 51 years, is "a landmark in the development of increased understanding and cooperation between the two countries and the creation of a mutually beneficial partnership," the Declaration stated.

The Declaration weaves together the new elements of an emerging partnership reflecting India's knowledge economy and its energy appetite and a changing Saudi Arabia looking eastward for fresh infusion of technology and skilled manpower.

But more than anything else, if there was one thing that epitomised this new dawn in India-Saudi ties, it was the joint declaration to combat terrorism and other transnational crimes like money-laundering, drugs and arms smuggling.

"Terrorism is a scourge for all mankind and there is a need to intensify and coordinate... cooperation to combat and eradicate the menace of terrorism," said the Declaration. "The signing of the memorandum of understanding between Saudi Arabia

Special Gestures

Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud's visit to India was marked by special gestures by both sides, underlining the importance they attach to the relations between the two nations.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh broke protocol by going to the airport to both receive and send off the Saudi King.

And the King reciprocated by going against convention and personally signing the Delhi Declaration — the first time he has signed a joint communique with any head of government or state.

Prime Minister Singh, who informed reporters about the gesture, said: "It was a unique honour for me."

and India on combating crime will help in the fight against terrorism, extremism and criminal elements," it added.

Underlining the fact that it wasn't just rhetoric, the two sides backed a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism which is before the U.N. General Assembly, and agreed to set up an International Counter-Terrorism Centre as suggested by the International Conference on Counter-Terrorism.

The development of a "strategic energy partnership" was another milestone during the visit with Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil producer that supplies nearly 30 percent of India's crude oil, assuring New Delhi that it will continue to be "a trusted and reliable source of oil". This partnership will include "stable and increased volume of crude oil supplies, through long-term contracts and cooperative and joint ventures... in the upstream and downstream oil and gas sectors in India and Saudi Arabia as well as in third countries".

India will also assist in setting up an ICT Centre of Excellence as well as institutes of higher learning in Saudi Arabia and encourage Saudi students to pursue postgraduate and doctorate level studies in technical institutions in India. ■

DECLARATION HIGHLIGHTS

- Exchanges of high-level bilateral visits and consultations should be intensified in order to give an impetus to and expand the scope of bilateral cooperation and understanding.
- The two Governments would closely and actively cooperate to fight the menace of terrorism and other transnational crimes like money-laundering, drugs and arms smuggling in a sustained and comprehensive manner.
- The two countries shall make concerted efforts for an early realisation of the proposals to conclude a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism which is before the U.N. General Assembly, and the setting up of an International Counter-Terrorism Centre.
- Both countries would develop a strategic energy partnership based on complementarity and interdependence.
- The two Governments would encourage and support entrepreneurs in both countries to harness each other's strengths for mutual benefit and promote economic cooperation actively.
- The two countries would work for closer cooperation in the field of technology, in particular in the field of information and communication technology, agriculture, biotechnology, and non-conventional energy technologies.
- The two countries would explore the prospect of cooperation in the health sector to realise the promising possibilities for enhancing cooperation in this sector.
- The two sides agreed to work together towards resolving outstanding conflicts in the world through peaceful means.
- The two sides welcomed the ongoing dialogue between India and Pakistan to settle all outstanding issues.