

Charge d' Affaires Message on Independence Day 2015

I have the pleasure to convey my greetings and felicitations to all my fellow countrymen in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the occasion of the 69th Independence Day of India. I also take this opportunity to express my deep sense of gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud and his government for their continued support and cooperation. Today is certainly a day of joy for all of us. But on this celebration of independence, my thoughts turn towards the martyrs who made supreme sacrifices for the freedom of our country and great patriots whose relentless struggle liberated our motherland from the colonial rule of nearly two hundred years.

India and Saudi Arabia enjoy cordial and friendly relations reflecting the centuries old economic and socio-cultural ties. The peoples of the Indian sub-continent and the Arabian Peninsula have been interacting with each other through trade and commerce dating back to several millennia, fulfilling each others' necessities and requirements. The commonalities in our culture, tradition and language bear testimony to this historic relationship. Our bilateral relations have made significant progress over the years. The Delhi Declaration of 2006 and the Riyadh Declaration of 2010 laid down strong foundation for our relationship. The historic visit of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to India as the Crown Prince in 2014, has been an important milestone towards our strategic partnership.

The Government of India is committed to putting the Indian economy on a fast track. India is now the fastest growing large economy. The important initiatives and structural reforms carried out by the government to improve the business environment in the country have indeed propelled the economy to a higher growth trajectory. India's GDP growth has now rocketed to 7.4%, which is the fastest among all the large economies of the world. While there is a renewed focus to usher in further reforms so that the GDP growth could be accelerated and sustained, the government has not lost sight of the fact that the benefits of the economic growth should trickle down to those at the bottom of the economic pyramid. Through the initiatives like Make India and Digital India, the government is not only committed to giving a big push to the manufacturing and export sectors of our economy, but through Skill India and Jan Dhan Yojana the government is equally committed to meeting the demand of skilled manpower and also ensuring that the benefits like subsidies and scholarships reach the targeted people.

Recognizing the need for connecting India, the Indian government has given a major thrust to augmenting the infrastructure to aid in connectivity. Be it Railways, Roads, Shipping or even the digital infrastructure of optical fibre, steps are being taken to provide world class infrastructure. In order to ensure transparency and corruption free governance, the government is steering policy changes to remove discretion, arbitrariness and irrationality in decision making.

The economic ties constitute an important element of the India Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership. Saudi Arabia today is our 4th largest trade partner and continues

to be vital to India's energy security as the most significant source for our crude oil requirements. During 2014-15, our bilateral trade reached USD 39.4 billion despite considerable drop in oil prices. There is a trend towards diversification of trade basket in favour of non-oil sectors. Major Indian companies have established strong presence in Saudi Arabia in diverse sectors from management, consultancy and IT to automobiles, telecommunications and construction. Saudi companies are also looking at India to invest in the petrochemicals and R&D. The trade ties at present are quite substantial, but still there is much scope for progress in the areas of trade, investment and joint ventures. The recently held 11th Meeting of India Saudi Arabia Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) in New Delhi, from May 27-28, 2015, was an important event towards strengthening economic, trade and investment ties. The JCM was co-chaired by Mr. Arun Jaitley, Minister of Finance from the Indian side and by Dr. Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al Rabiah, Saudi Minister of Commerce and Industry from the Saudi side.

Bilateral defence ties have gained considerable momentum since the signing of landmark Memorandum of Understanding on Defence Cooperation during the visit of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud to India as the Crown Prince in 2014. The ship visits and joint maneuvers have become a regular feature for the two Navies. Recently the Indian Naval Ship INS Tarangini, one of the rare sailing ships visited the Jeddah Port. More Indian Naval warships are expected to visit the Saudi ports in the coming months. Last month, in an important development, the Indian Air force Sukhoi 30 fighter aircrafts along with the Globemaster Transport Aircrafts landed for the first time in Saudi Arabia, heralding a new chapter in defence ties. The active participation of the Saudi side at the AERO India and DEFEXPO shows in India along with the regular bilateral visits of the senior defense officers has become an important component of our bilateral defence co-operation.

We also remain grateful to the Saudi Ministry of Defence who actively cooperated with our Government, offering safe passages to Indian aircrafts through Saudi controlled airspace and also providing unrestricted access to the blockaded Yemeni ports of Aden, Mukallah and Houdedah for Indian Navy rescue ships. The valuable support by the Saudi authorities helped in evacuation of over 5000 Indians from Yemen.

Saudi Arabia is home to the largest Indian passport-holding community abroad. I express my sincere gratitude to the Kingdom for hosting a large Indian community who has earned a reputation for their hard work, discipline and adherence to local rules and customs; and also express appreciation for the excellent efforts made and services provided by the Saudi authorities to the Haj and Umrah pilgrims from India.

I take this opportunity, once again, to greet my fellow citizens in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on this occasion of the 69th Independence Day of India.
