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Title: Statement regarding Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): Hon'ble Speaker, I rise to inform this august House about the historic visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from February 27 to March 1, 2010 at the invitation of His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud .

The Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia took place 28 years after the last visit by an Indian Prime Minister, that of late Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1982. Prime Minister was accompanied by a high-powered delegation consisting of Ministers of Health and Family Welfare, Petroleum and Natural Gas, Commerce and Industry and the Minister of State for External Affairs apart from senior officials.

Prime Minister was accorded an exceptionally warm welcome by the Saudi leadership. In a departure from protocol, the Prime Minister was received at the airport by His Royal Highness Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz, the Minister of Defence and Aviation, Crown Prince Naif Bin Abdul Aziz, Second Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister, Crown Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Governor of Riyadh and members of the Saudi Cabinet. Prior to his talks with His Majesty King Abdullah a ceremonial arrival with an impressive Guard of Honour was held at His Majesty's residential Palace which is a rare honour. All these gestures reflected the special significance attached to the Prime Minister's visit by the highest levels of the Saudi leadership.

The Prime Minister's visit took place after the visit of His Majesty King Abdullah to India as Chief Guest at our Republic Day celebrations in 2006, when the Delhi Declaration was signed by both leaders.

The Hon'ble Prime Minister's visit provided an opportunity for the two leaders to review the progress in bilateral relations in recent years, and in particular the implementation of the Delhi Declaration. They also discussed regional and global issues of mutual interest.

Saudi Arabia is an important country and a factor of stability in the region. It is the largest country and economy in the GCC. Economic ties constitute a solid foundation of our relations. Our bilateral trade has seen exponential growth exceeding US\$ 25 billion in 2008-09. Saudi Arabia is a reliable, valuable and major supplier of crude oil to India. We import about 20% of our energy requirements from Saudi Arabia which may be further increased over time to meet our energy and development needs. We have been assured of continued Saudi understanding and support in this regard.

The most important outcome of the visit was the signing of the historic Riyadh Declaration by the Prime Minister and His Majesty King Abdullah, in which India and Saudi Arabia decided to raise our cooperation to a strategic partnership covering security, economic, defence and political areas. In particular, both leaders emphasised the importance of strengthening the strategic energy partnership. It was also agreed that both sides would work towards meeting their vast requirements relating to infrastructure and development by augmenting the flow of investments into each other's countries.

The two leaders renewed their condemnation of the phenomena of terrorism, extremism and violence, affirming that it is global and threatens all societies and is not linked to any race, colour or belief. The international community must, therefore, resolutely combat terrorism. The two sides agreed to enhance cooperation in exchange of information relating to terrorist activities, money laundering, narcotics, arms and human trafficking, and develop joint strategies to combat these threats.

The Prime Minister conveyed our gratitude to the Saudi leadership for the

arrangements made for Haj and Umrah pilgrims from India.

In addition, the following Agreements and MoUs were signed:

- (i) Extradition Treaty;
- (ii) Agreement for Transfer of Sentenced Persons;
- (iii) Memorandum of Understanding between the Indian Space Research Organisation and the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology for cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space;
- (iv) Agreement on scientific and technological cooperation between the Department of Science and Technology and the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia; and

An MOU on Cultural Cooperation between the respective Ministries of Culture.

Several other Agreements in the business, trade, research and education, media and information technology sectors were signed on the sidelines of the visit.

As a special gesture, the Prime Minister was invited to address the Majlis Al Shoura in Saudi Arabia. The prestigious Government University, the King Saud University, conferred an Honorary Doctorate on the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

A high powered CEOs delegation also accompanied the Prime Minister. They had productive interactions with their Saudi counterparts. There was significant interest in directing Saudi investible surpluses to our infrastructure sector and other mutually beneficial projects. The Prime Minister addressed captains of the Saudi business and industry.

The Prime Minister also interacted with a cross-section of the Indian community in Saudi Arabia, which numbers nearly 1.8 million and is the single largest population of Indian passport holders outside India. The Prime Minister applauded their hard work and assured them that their welfare was of paramount concern to us. The Saudi leadership expressed their deep appreciation for the contribution of the Indian community to the development of the Saudi economy.

The visit of the Hon'ble Prime Minister was highly successful and has underscored the mutual desire of both countries to take our bilateral relation to a higher level.

(Placed in Library, See No. LT 1739/15/10)

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