

Centre for West Asian Studies,
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One-day National seminar on

India and Saudi Arabia: The Emerging Socio-Cultural and Economic Dimension

Concept Note

India and Saudi Arabia relation has changed in the cooperation of string bilateral association based on trust, friendship and mutual benefit. This has been witnessed almost at every level like society, culture, literature, security, foreign policy, political, economic, orientation. The history of the contact between the two peninsulas of India and Arabia dates back far in time. Indian civilization had very old ties with the people of Nile Valley, Mesopotamia and Dilmun civilizations that flourished in West Asian region. These ancient contacts are clearly visible in the areas like culture, architecture, religion etc. that were significantly enhanced by those people who migrated and settle down across these civilizations for various purposes including trade and business. Not only this, scholars traversed across the seas to study medicine, culture, sciences and arts were another source of interaction between the two regions.

The new millennium came with a new morning in relationship with the signing of the Riyadh declaration, termed the start of a “new era of strategic partnership”. The declaration which has been signed between Prime minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in 2010 set a road map for a closer Indo-Saudi bilateral partnership. However, close analysis of Indo-Saudi partnership assume greater significant not only because both countries are inspired to play greater roles in contemporary regional and International politics, but it goes beyond that. Beside these, the commonalities between the two in term of huge geographical size, large population, strong economy, growing military power, and most importantly ‘special relationship’ with the USA, provided a strong base for the further enhancement of the strategic partnership. From the Indian perspective Saudi Arabia is crucial not only for the energy security but strong ties with Kingdom would provide India a unique platform for greater access to other countries of the region.

Indo-Saudi political relations remained “tenuous” during the initial years of the post-Cold War period due to the Kashmir issue as Saudi supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. In the recent years, however, shift in Saudi Arabian approach toward India and Pakistan, and particularly in relation to the Kashmir issue, have given way to understand the need for exploring the existing political opportunities. Today, Saudi Arabia calls for resolving the difference on the Kashmir issue bilaterally based on the existing Shimla and Lahore agreements confirms with New Delhi’s stand. Moreover, Kingdom was also convinced that India did not require any third party mediation or interference in resolving the Kashmir issue. This change in stand is significant for India as it removed one of the important obstacles in realising the full potential in bilateral relationship. Moreover, it also helped to have consensus at home regarding a close and strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia.

Over the past twenty years, terrorists have committed extremely violent acts for alleged political or religious reasons. These religious extremists reject the authority of secular governments such as India as well as monarchy of Saudi’s and view legal systems not based on their religious. Saudi Arabia has always adopted a policy of zero tolerance on the issue of terrorism. It is just a lack of clear understanding among Indians about Saudi Arabia's strategic security and foreign policy shift. The first major terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia in May and November 2003, prompted renewed efforts on the part of the Saudi government to counter domestic terrorism and extremism.

India and Saudi Arabia have developed a close understanding on the need to eradicating the menace of terrorism. Such understanding started to develop only after 9/11 attack on the US in which 15 Saudi Nationals were allegedly found to be involved leading to strong criticism of Saudi policy towards terrorism and there

alleged funding the extremist. Like India, Saudi Arabia also faces the threat of terrorism and Saudi began to realize the importance to engage other Asian powers like India to counter the rising menace. Given India's experience in the fight against terrorism, it can assist Saudi Arabia to deal with this tactics of proxy war as India has been a victim of terrorism for many decades.

The Indo-Saudi cooperation on security and terrorism was evident when the Saudi government had helped India to apprehend key terror suspects. The counter-terrorism cooperation has seen a steady rise in the last eight years with regular exchange of information and meetings with both internal and external security agencies of both countries. The two sides agreed to not only enhance cooperation in exchange of information relating to terrorist activities, money laundering, narcotics, arms and human trafficking, but also develop joint strategies to combat these threats. In other words Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, following the September 11, 2011 attacks, has been an attempt to look beyond its traditional allies and to build closer relations with other countries, especially with major Asian powers such as India on the issue of tackling terrorism.

The governments of India and Saudi have been facilitating two-way business engagements, keeping in mind the vast Indian Market and expertise and Saudi seeking to diversify its economy with its immense financial resources. Al-Rabiah, the delegation representing sectors such as fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, housing, power, petrochemicals & refinery, steel, metals, mining and mechanical equipment, urged Indian companies to take advantage of investment and growth opportunities in the Kingdom. The two countries have encouraged and organized opportunities for businesses from both countries to invest and take advantage of the potential of their economies. Thus there has been major collaboration in the petroleum sector and infrastructure. There has been a significant growth in the import and export of food products from both the countries. Moreover, Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma during a meeting with his Saudi counterpart sought the kingdom's support for early conclusion of the free trade agreement with the six nation (GCC) countries. Energy security is to a large extent the driving forces in India and Saudi relations, especially for India. The fast pace on which India economy has been growing associates with increased demand on energy.

Sub theme:-

- India's Foreign Policy towards West Asia especially with Saudi Arabia
- India and Saudi Arabia strategic partnership in a new era
- India and Saudi Arabia cooperation in the area of international and regional peace, stability and countering terrorism
- India and Saudi Arabia relationship and its impact on labor migration
- India and Saudi Arabia defence co-operation in combating terrorism
- India and Saudi Arabia bilateral relations: defence and security
- India and Saudi Arabia working towards Asian convergence in world order
- Role of Islam as a political force in India and Saudi Arabia relations
- Cultural exchanges between India and Saudi Arabia since its inception
- Islam as a cultural factor in India and Saudi Arabia relations
- Role of Arabic literature in strengthening India and Saudi Arabia relations

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