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PM Modi leaves for 2-day Saudi Arabia visit, lauds 'strategic depth, momentum' of bilateral ties

Context and Significance of the Visit

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia signals a deepening strategic relationship between India and the Gulf kingdom.
- The timing is crucial, as both India and Saudi Arabia undergo parallel internal transformations, led by reformist leaders—Modi and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS).
- This visit is positioned not just as a diplomatic ritual, but as a marker of a new era of *multi-dimensional, future-oriented cooperation*.

From Underperformance to Acceleration in Bilateral Ties

- Historically, Indo-Saudi ties were lukewarm. Only six Indian Prime Ministerial visits to Saudi Arabia took place between 1947 and the early 2000s.
- India's past engagement was restrained by **ideological caution, a conservative foreign policy**, and viewing Saudi Arabia primarily through a **Pakistan-centric lens**.
- A turnaround began in the early 2000s with higher-level exchanges, but the real momentum accelerated under Modi's leadership since 2016, with three significant visits.
- This signals India's shift from *passive diplomacy to strategic prioritization* of the Gulf region.

Strategic and Economic Convergence

- The relationship has evolved beyond **oil trade** and **Indian diaspora ties**.
- India and Saudi Arabia are now cooperating in:
 - **Counterterrorism** and intelligence sharing
 - **Technology transfer** and innovation
 - **Infrastructure and investment projects**
 - **Renewable energy and industrial development**
- The frequency of bilateral visits and MoUs indicates a maturing, **multi-sectoral partnership**.



The MbS Factor: Modernising Saudi Arabia

- Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's leadership has driven sweeping **economic, political, and social reforms**.
- Governance has shifted from traditional consensus to a **centralised and decisive model**, enabling faster implementation but attracting criticism over authoritarian methods.
- MbS's leadership has resulted in Saudi Arabia repositioning itself as a **progressive and reform-oriented** power.

Vision 2030: Reshaping the Saudi Economy

- *Vision 2030* is MbS's flagship reform agenda aimed at diversifying Saudi Arabia's oil-dependent economy.
- Key initiatives include:
 - **Privatisation of Aramco**
 - Creation of **Neom** – a futuristic mega-city focused on AI, sustainability, and smart infrastructure
 - Growth in sectors like **tourism, entertainment, and technology**
- The goal is not just economic growth but a **rebranding of Saudi Arabia** as a hub for global investment and innovation.

Cultural Liberalisation and Social Reform

- MbS has brought **unprecedented cultural liberalisation**:
 - **Women's mobility and workforce participation** have expanded
 - **Public entertainment** including cinemas, concerts, and sports has returned
 - **Youth-centric policies** have revitalized urban life and employment opportunities
- The state is promoting a "**moderate Islam**", seeking to reduce radical influences and align more with global norms.

A More Assertive and Multipolar Foreign Policy

- Saudi Arabia under MbS has adopted a **pragmatic and diversified foreign policy**:
 - It has reduced reliance on the U.S. and built ties with **China, Russia, and BRICS countries**



- It balances between military assertiveness and **diplomatic recalibration** in the Middle East
- Saudi Arabia seeks to become a **decisive actor in a multipolar global order**

Echoes of India's Own Foreign Policy Shift

- India's foreign policy under Modi similarly shifted from **ideology to pragmatism**, emphasizing **strategic autonomy**.
- Both nations are:
 - Leveraging **geopolitical location**
 - Engaging in **multilateral diplomacy**
 - Acting as **mediators** in regional disputes
 - Promoting **economic self-reliance and innovation**
- This shared strategic worldview sets the stage for **greater Indo-Saudi alignment** in global and regional affairs.

Geostrategic Implications and Long-Term Vision

- The Indo-Saudi partnership is likely to influence:
 - The **future of West Asian geopolitics**
 - The **energy transition agenda** of both nations
 - **Trade connectivity** through the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC)
 - **Digital and defense cooperation**
- India can emerge as a **key partner** in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 execution, while Riyadh can support India's West Asia policy.

Conclusion: Defining a 21st-Century Partnership

- Modi's visit symbolizes more than bilateral warmth—it represents **India and Saudi Arabia's ascent as reforming middle powers** with transformative ambitions.
- Both leaders are **redefining national identity, governance, and diplomacy** in their respective countries.
- As Saudi Arabia modernizes and India globalizes, this partnership could become a **pillar of future geopolitics**, especially across the **Global South and West Asia**.



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