



Saudi Arabia Foreign Minister's Visit

Why in News

Recently, the **Indian External Affairs Minister** met the **Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**.



Key Points

▪ About the Meeting:

- **Cooperation in Multilateral Forums:** Discussed **bilateral cooperation** in multilateral forums such as the [United Nations](#), [G-20](#) and [Gulf Cooperation Council](#) (GCC).
 - India is **not a member of GCC**.
- **Implementation of the Strategic Partnership Council Agreement (signed in 2019):**
 - **India-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council** was formed to coordinate on strategically important issues.
 - The council will be headed by the Prime Minister and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and will meet every two years.
 - India is the **fourth country** with which **Saudi Arabia has formed such a strategic partnership**, after the UK, France and China.
 - Saudi Arabia has been a strategic partner of India since the signing of the **Riyadh Declaration** in 2010.
- **Focus on the Developments in [Afghanistan and Other Regional Issues](#):** Saudi Arabia, along with Pakistan and the UAE, were the **key backers of the Taliban regime** that ruled Kabul from 1996 till 2001 when they were ousted by US-led international troops.

- **Strengthening Partnership:** Discussed further steps to strengthen their partnership in trade, investment, energy, defence, security, culture, consular issues, health care, and human resources.
- **India - Saudi Arabia Ties:**
 - **Crude oil Supplier:** Saudi Arabia is currently India's **second-largest supplier of crude oil (Iraq has been India's top supplier)**.
 - Saudi Arabia is keen to play a role in the creation of **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs)** at Padur in Karnataka.
 - A study is being conducted for the setting up of the **world's largest greenfield refinery** at Raigarh in Maharashtra by **Saudi Aramco**, Adnoc of the United Arab Emirates and Indian public sector oil companies.
 - **Bilateral Trade:** Saudi Arabia is **India's fourth largest trade partner** (after China, USA and Japan). The bilateral trade was valued at US \$33.07 billion during FY 2019-20.
 - During the same period, India's imports from Saudi Arabia reached US \$26.84 billion and exports to Saudi Arabia were worth US\$ 6.24 billion registering an increase of 12.18% over last year.
 - **Indian Diaspora:** The 2.6 million-strong Indian community in Saudi Arabia is the largest expatriate community in the Kingdom and is the 'most preferred community' due to their expertise, sense of discipline, law-abiding and peace-loving nature.
 - **Cultural Linkages: Haj pilgrimage** is another important component of bilateral relations between India and Saudi Arabia.
 - **Naval Exercise:** Recently, India and Saudi Arabia started their first-ever Naval joint exercise called the **Al-Mohed Al-Hindi Exercise**.

Way Forward

- The **trade balance between India and Saudi Arabia is highly in favour of Saudi Arabia**, and India's exports are mainly restricted to the agricultural sector. There is a need for India to increase its product base to balance the trade in its favour.
 - The potential areas for the next stage of bilateral cooperation could be infrastructure, energy, skilling and IT.
- Further, India **should convince Saudi Arabia to exercise its influence over Pakistan in controlling the Taliban** in Afghanistan.
 - A joint collaborative effort of both economies will transform the Southwest Asia sub-region.

Source: IE