

A New Era in India-Kuwait Relations

Posted at: 24/12/2024

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Context : Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kuwait marked a historic milestone as the two nations elevated their bilateral ties to a "strategic" partnership. This development signifies enhanced cooperation in trade, defence, and other areas while highlighting India's growing influence in the Gulf region amidst evolving global dynamics.

A Brief Overview of India-Kuwait Ties

Background

- India and Kuwait share a long history of **friendly relations**, rooted in cultural and economic ties that have endured over time.
- India was among the **first nations** to establish diplomatic relations with Kuwait after its independence from the British Protectorate in 1961.
- Until 1961, the **Indian Rupee** was used as legal tender in Kuwait.

Current Dynamics

- **Crude oil supplier:** Kuwait is India's **sixth-largest supplier**, meeting **3% of its energy needs**.
 - **Trade growth:** Indian exports to Kuwait exceeded **\$2 billion** for the first time, while Kuwaiti investments in India surpassed **\$10 billion**.
 - **Indian diaspora:** Over **1 million Indians** form Kuwait's largest expatriate community, contributing significantly to its **economy and development**.
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Highlights of the Prime Minister's Visit

Historic Firsts

- **First visit in 43 years:** Modi's **two-day visit** was the first by an Indian Prime Minister since **Indira Gandhi's visit in 1981**.
- **Civilian honor:** Kuwait awarded Modi its **highest civilian honor**, 'The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer,' recognizing his contributions to strengthening bilateral ties.

Engagements with Kuwaiti Leadership

- Meetings with:

- **Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.**
- **Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah.**
- **Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.**

Strengthening Bilateral Relations

1. Defence Cooperation:

- Signed a **comprehensive defence agreement** covering:
 - **Training** and exchange of personnel.
 - **Joint military exercises.**
 - Research and supply of **defence technology.**

2. Trade and Economy:

- Bilateral trade reached **\$10.47 billion** in **2023-24.**
- Modi invited the **Kuwait Investment Authority** to explore opportunities in **energy, pharmaceuticals, food parks, and infrastructure.**

3. Additional Agreements:

- Signed **three MoUs** in **Sports, Culture, and Solar Energy.**

4. Strategic Cooperation:

- Strengthened collaboration in:
 - **Pharmaceuticals**
 - **IT and FinTech**
 - **Infrastructure**
 - **Security**

Vision 2035 Alignment

- Modi praised Kuwait's developmental initiatives under 'Vision 2035' and emphasized mutual efforts to achieve shared objectives.

Implications of the Visit

1. People-to-People Connections:

- Acknowledged the contributions of the **1 million-strong Indian community** in Kuwait to its development.

2. Regional and Global Impact:

◦ **Collaboration with GCC:**

- Strengthened ties with the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** under Kuwait's presidency.
- Advocated for concluding the **India-GCC Free Trade Agreement**, aiming to boost trade, which reached **\$184.46 billion** in **2022-23.**

◦ **Shared Vision for West Asia:**

- Discussed strategies for **peace, stability, and prosperity** in West Asia.
- Reaffirmed a **joint stance against terrorism** and a commitment to dismantling **terror networks.**

Conclusion

Prime Minister Modi's visit has laid a solid foundation for a **dynamic and robust India-Kuwait partnership**. With strengthened **defence ties**, expanded **trade**, and strategic **alignment**, this renewed relationship promises **significant benefits** for both nations and the broader Gulf region.



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