

**Speech by the President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the banquet hosted in honour of Mohammed Bin Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince, Vice President and Defence Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

1. It is with great pleasure I warmly welcome Your Royal Highness and your distinguished delegation to India.
2. We fondly remember the historic visits of the Custodian of Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Abdullah in 2006 and His Majesty King Salman in 2014 to New Delhi.
3. The visit of our Prime Minister in 2016 to Saudi Arabia has further expanded our Strategic Partnership.
4. Your Royal Highness, our two countries have rich historical connections based on shared civilizational linkages. These affinities find expression in ever growing economic exchanges and vibrant people-to-people contacts. We deeply appreciate your special gesture of inviting India as the ‘Guest of Honour’ at Janadriyah 2018.
5. The depth of our engagement has, indeed, been vast and immeasurable. The stories and fables of India reached the shores of Arabia and from you to other parts of the world. It is the Arab mind that the world remains indebted to in so many different fields of arts and science. The Arab intellect ever vigorous, exploratory and quick to absorb knowledge, translated the “Panchtantra” into the “Kalila Wa Dimna”, and other such works. In return, the monsoon, derived from the Arabic word “*mausim*” brought for our people the scholarship and brotherhood of their Arab friends. The book Ajaib-al-Hind contains so many accounts of our merchants and traders, philosophers and mendicants, of their togetherness and interactions, as they crisscrossed the vast Indian Ocean. The birth of the modern world owes a lot to this historical engagement between our peoples.
6. Your Royal Highness, based on the richness of our age-old ties, our people, from diverse backgrounds, have over the ages, lived in peace and harmony. Our shared cultural experiences, economic synergies and common quest for a peaceful and sustainable world make us natural partners. Your Royal Highness, we deeply appreciate your efforts to bring social change and progress, especially among the youth and women in your country.
7. India deeply values Saudi Arabia as a reliable partner for its energy security. We welcome your participation in our Strategic Petroleum Reserves. We are equally delighted at Aramco’s participation in the upcoming world’s largest greenfield oil refinery. And we thank you for joining the International Solar Alliance.

8. Your Royal Highness, we look at Saudi Arabia as a factor of stability in the region and beyond. We appreciate your visionary leadership to diversify the economy. We welcome your 'Vision 2030' programme. Let me assure that India wishes to be a strong and reliable partner for the Kingdom's growth and progress. Our companies have invested in and created jobs in Saudi Arabia, especially in the technology sector, which is India's strength. We also welcome your commitment to strengthen your presence in our growth story, in our Make in India, Skill India, Digital India, Start-up India programmes, and our next-generation infrastructure projects.
9. Your Royal Highness, terrorism is the gravest threat to humanity today. We thank you for your strong condemnation of the barbaric terror attack in Pulwama, and for standing by the people of India. India and Saudi Arabia, and indeed, the global community must come together to defeat and destroy these evil forces and combat radicalisation. Those responsible for such acts have no place in our peace-loving society, and they need to be dealt with, firmly and decisively.
10. Your Royal Highness, the linkages between the people of our two friendly countries date back to several millennia. Saudi Arabia has generously embraced a large number of Indian expatriates and encouraged them to flourish and grow. Through their hard work, professionalism and commitment to peace and progress, they have made significant contribution to your growth and prosperity. We are confident of the continued support of the Government of Saudi Arabia in ensuring their well-being and welfare.
11. I once again extend a very warm and special welcome to Your Royal Highness. I am confident that your visit will herald a new chapter in our excellent bilateral relations.

Shukran! Thank you.

\*\*\*

AKT/SH/AK