

Speech

by

Ambassador Nalin Surie

Director General
Indina Council of World Affairs

at the

Annual Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Cultural "Janadriyah 2018"

organized by the

Saudi Arabian National Guard

at

Riyadh
11 February 2018

I am greatly honored to have been asked to speak at this important seminar on the occasion of India's participation in the prestigious "Janadriyah 2018". The subject of my presentation is 'Indo-Saudi Arabia Bilateral Ties: Present Realities and Future Prospects'. This is a huge subject and its scope encompasses many critical dimensions.

Even to this distinguished audience, it is necessary to recall the long civilizational contact between India and Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries as a whole. We share a common Indo-Islamic cultural heritage that is a living reality even today. It is pertinent here to recall what then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said in Jeddah during his visit in September 1956: He said and I quote:

"So far as my country is concerned, for the last 1,200 or 1,300 years and even more, we had intimate contacts with the Saudi Arabian people in many ways. The great religion which emanated in this country and spread far and wide came to India in the earliest days and a very considerable population of India today represents and believes in that religion which we are proud to consider in India a great religion of India."

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has and continues to host a very large number of Indian pilgrims every year for the Haj and Umrah. Last year 1,70,000 Indians performed Haj and around 3,00,000 perform Umrah every year. We are particularly thankful for the facilities offered to them and look forward to even greater participation by our pilgrims in the Haj and Umrah.

Saudi Arabia and India have maintained contact at the highest levels since India's independence in 1947 and this has been reflected in the visits to India by their Majesties the Custodians of the two Holy Mosques in Mecca & Madina in 1955 and 2006 and by Indian Prime Ministers who visited Saudi Arabia in 1956, 1982, 2010 and most recently Prime Minister Modi in 2016.

Saudi Arabia has been a vital part of India's energy security programmes and skilled Indian personnel in a variety of areas of specialization have contributed not only to the development of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but have in turn greatly benefitted the Indian economy.

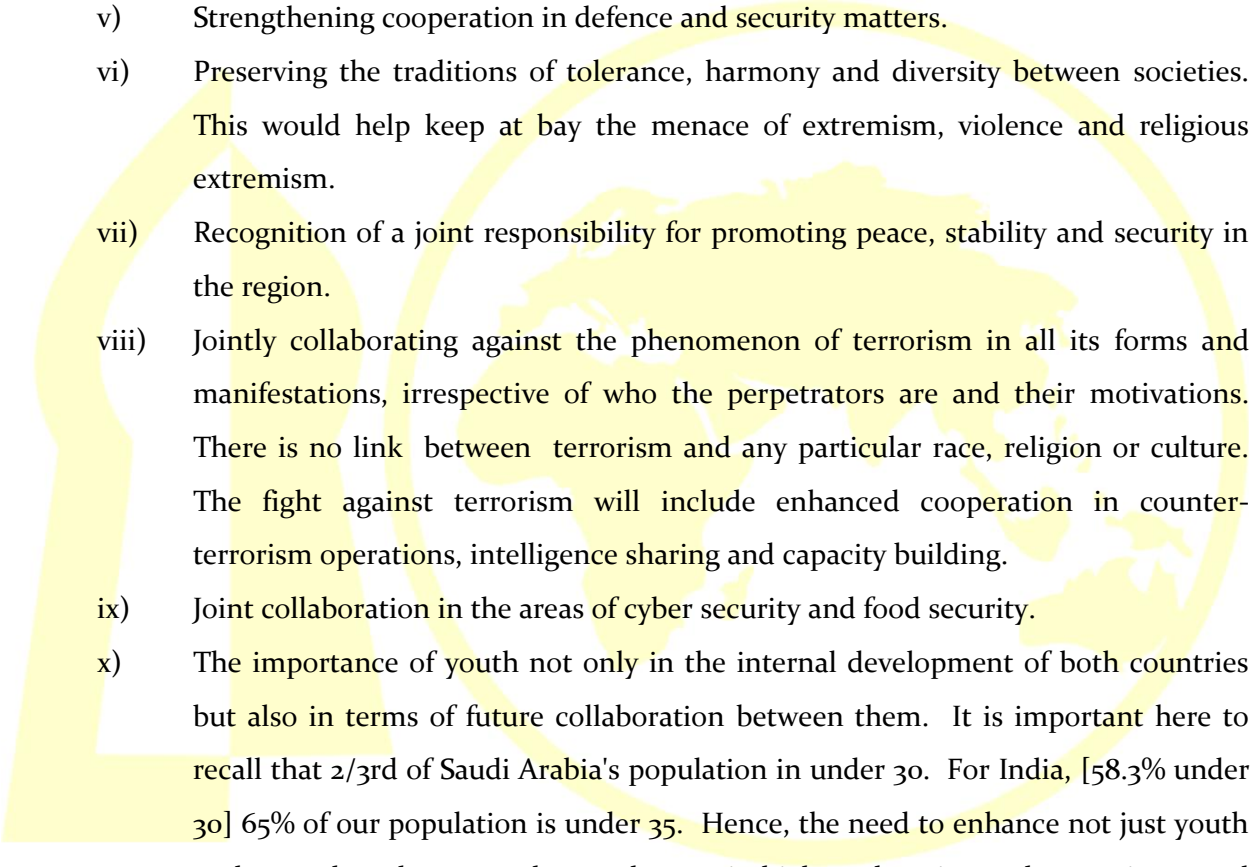
Our relationship has been based on mutual benefit, complementarities, shared traditions and friendship. In effect, the foundation for a significantly enhanced relationship in the modern era had been laid by our leadership since the middle of the last century and it is, therefore, no surprise that since the beginning of this, the 21st century, we have reprogrammed the scope and content of our bilateral relationship to take into account our future destiny, common development, shared security requirements and the future needs of both our countries.

In this century, there have been three critical visits during which, the parameters of what I would like to refer to as "India-Saudi Arabia 2.0" have been postulated. It began with the visit of His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to India in January 2006 at which time he was honoured as the Chief Guest at India's Republic day celebrations. The Delhi Declaration marked the beginning of this new multidimensional and more integrated relationship. It was followed by the Riyadh Declaration on 1 March 2010 postulated during the visit of then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at which time the two sides raised their cooperation to a new era of strategic partnership covering security, defence and political areas.

This new era was further cemented by the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Riyadh on 3 April 2016. On that occasion, our two leaders clearly recognized the close interlinkage of the stability and security of the Gulf region and the Indian sub-continent as well as the need for maintaining a secure and peaceful environment for the development of the countries in the region. They further agreed to enhance cooperation and strengthen maritime security in the Gulf and in the Indian Ocean regions which are considered vital for the security and prosperity of both our countries.

The outlines for the future of the bilateral relationship have been clearly spelt out by our two leaders and I would venture to suggest that the areas of collaboration which will determine our future cooperation include the following:

- i) Both countries to develop as knowledge-based economies taking into account their respective strengths in for example information technology, space science and other frontier technologies. This opens up enormous opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration.

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- ii) Agreement to develop a broad-based economic partnership that takes into account our respective economic reform programmes and the need to meet each other's enormous infrastructure, energy and other requirements to mutual benefit.
 - iii) To substantially expand and diversify mutual trade and investments.
 - iv) The importance of strengthening the strategic partnership in the energy sector including both in the upstream and downstream sectors and in renewable sources of energy. We must jointly address the issue of climate change. We look forward to Saudi Arabia joining the International Solar Alliance.
 - v) Strengthening cooperation in defence and security matters.
 - vi) Preserving the traditions of tolerance, harmony and diversity between societies. This would help keep at bay the menace of extremism, violence and religious extremism.
 - vii) Recognition of a joint responsibility for promoting peace, stability and security in the region.
 - viii) Jointly collaborating against the phenomenon of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, irrespective of who the perpetrators are and their motivations. There is no link between terrorism and any particular race, religion or culture. The fight against terrorism will include enhanced cooperation in counter-terrorism operations, intelligence sharing and capacity building.
 - ix) Joint collaboration in the areas of cyber security and food security.
 - x) The importance of youth not only in the internal development of both countries but also in terms of future collaboration between them. It is important here to recall that 2/3rd of Saudi Arabia's population is under 30. For India, [58.3% under 30] 65% of our population is under 35. Hence, the need to enhance not just youth exchanges but also strengthen exchanges in higher education, culture, science and technology etc.

This ten point blueprint would clearly suggest that India and Saudi Arabia are in the process of rediscovering each other in the 21st century. It also points to a clear recognition that given the current external circumstances, both our countries need to work together to fulfill our common goals and aspirations – national, regional and international.

The processes of economic reform and restructuring underway in both our countries and the challenges facing the international community such as terrorism, climate change, cyber security, water scarcity, political uncertainty and a series of regional crises demand that our partnership becomes ever more meaningful. There is a clear appreciation and understanding of this in the top leadership on both sides and our effort must be to build on their vision for a dynamic, strategic and forward looking partnership.

The development of India's relations with Saudi Arabia fits very neatly into India's "neighbourhood first" approach. It is also consistent with the path of international engagement that Prime Minister Modi has identified for India and which focuses on rebuilding connectivity, shaping relationships networked with India's economic and strategic priorities, building development partnerships, making India a human resource power and helping reconfigure, reinvigorate and rebuild global institutions and organizations.

Both our countries are maritime nations. We are also neighbors with a deep and growing economic and strategic engagement. It is thus necessary for us to deepen economic and security cooperation especially in our maritime relationship. We believe that the primary responsibility for peace, prosperity and security in the Indian Ocean rests with those who live in this region. Yet, as Prime Minister Modi himself has clarified, ours is not an exclusive approach. We would be happy if Saudi Arabia were to take more interest in the region including in the IORA.

Both our countries are focused on development and ensuring the betterment of the lives of our people. We consider Saudi Arabia a very serious partner in India's future development especially in the infrastructure sector. We believe that Saudi Arabia should bet on India's secular growth in the years ahead and look forward to substantial participation by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund in India's growth story. Ours is already the world's fastest growing large economy and forecasts suggest this will remain the case for many years to come. We are determined to grow at between 8-10% for a considerably long duration. This is both feasible and likely to happen. Equally, we believe that we can offer our services, technologies and products to contribute to Saudi Arabia's process of restructuring its economy – its Vision 2030. The success of Vision 2030 programmes will in turn offer productive opportunities for Indian entities to participate in. This will be for our mutual

benefit. Our enhanced economic partnership will also enable both our countries to hedge in an uncertain global economic environment.

It would be desirable for experts and business on both sides to carefully examine the components of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and India's development plans and identify complementarities on which both can collaborate. This would help substantially expand trade and investment between our two countries, both of which are under potential.

I spoke earlier of the agreement between our two countries to collaborate on issues of maritime security. For a variety of reasons, this dimension has assumed a high salience not only in India's security calculus but also that of the other countries in Asia and the Pacific. It is an issue that is equally important for Saudi Arabia and the other countries in the region. Security of the Gulf is of critical interest and importance to both India and Saudi Arabia.

Equally, the Indo-Pacific is now gaining prominence and figures prominently in India's security thinking and planning. Other major players focusing on this include the USA, Japan & Australia. ASEAN seems interested. Related to this, is the need to establish an open, transparent, inclusive and balanced security architecture both in Asia and in the Indo-Pacific that ensures equal security for all. This is yet another area where our two countries can join hands to make a positive contribution in this important endeavour.

Our two countries are committed, without reservation, to fight the cancer of terrorism. I understand that collaboration in this critical area is evolving in a positive manner. Strengthening it further through greater cooperation in intelligence sharing etc. would be desirable.

Issues such as food security and access to drinking water and water for agriculture have also assumed a criticality in many countries of the world. The recent extreme shortage of water in Cape Town, South Africa is the only one such vivid example. These are again areas where we must collaborate not only to mutual benefit but also to contribute to the solution of these problems in our region and in other parts of the world.

Issues of inequality and social welfare have assumed enormous importance not only in developing countries but increasingly also in developed countries. This is having serious

internal political repercussions and require changes in economic and social policies so that disparities are substantially reduced. Both India and Saudi Arabia have embarked upon serious programmes of social welfare, economic betterment, development of small industry, skill development and digital education to address some of these problems. It would be worthwhile sharing our experiences in this regard so that we can learn from each other's successful programmes and collaborate, where appropriate.

Both our countries are members of the G20. The decisions taken at summit level interactions of the G20, following the global financial and economic crisis of 2008, helped mitigate the problems that arose in the international economic system following that crisis. However, while emergency measures that were taken to achieve this mitigation were reasonably successful, most other major reforms that had been generally agreed to, have still not been implemented. Now that the global economy appears to have overcome the major down sides of the global financial and economic crisis, the pressure to undertake major reforms may get further diluted. This would be unfortunate since the global financial and economic requirements of today are very different from those that followed the end of World War II. The existing architecture is unable to meet the requirements not only of developing countries for infrastructure and other critical aspects of development but there is no guarantee that it can ensure that another crisis of a similar nature will not happen again. It is thus imperative for countries like India and Saudi Arabia to continue to work towards a substantial reform of the international financial and economic architecture so as to make it more development-oriented and such that the developing countries in particular can fulfill their potential and the North-South divide is substantially reduced.

There is also the associated but equally important issue of reform of international institutions such as the United Nations and its Security Council. It is at the very least anachronistic, that almost at the end of the second decade of the 21st century, we are still having to function within an international architecture that was set up after the second World War. The world has since greatly evolved. Power is shifting from the West to Asia. The rapid pace of globalization in recent years coupled with the astonishing speed at which technology is changing the world, breaking barriers, creating global opportunities and challenges and challenging established systems demands that we fundamentally relook the international

political and security architecture also. Going ahead our two countries will need to strengthen our liaison on this fundamental aspect of reform also.

I have spoken longer than I had intended. Let me conclude by stressing that both our countries share common concerns, aspirations and objectives as we forge ahead in our respective efforts to transform, modernize and develop our countries. The opportunities for cooperation between us are enormous and multidimensional. We need to systematically identify project opportunities to jointly implement. In this process, the Indian Diaspora in Saudi Arabia can help play a critical role. At the same time, we must make efforts to ensure that we know much more about each other's country, our strengths, aspirations and plans. This would help us better understand each other and build greater trust and cooperation between us.

Once again I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on this national festive occasion on a very important subject.

