

# INDIA, SAUDI TO FORM STRATEGIC COUNCIL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India- West Asia

India and Saudi Arabia are set to sign an agreement for creating a bilateral strategic partnership council on Tuesday during the official visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Riyadh. The council will include multiple sections involving the External Affairs Ministry and NITI Aayog and counterpart organisations from Saudi Arabia.

The council will be led by Mr. Modi and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. Both sides are expected to seal several other agreements during Mr. Modi's visit.

Formation of the Council has been under discussion for some time and found mention during Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's India visit in February in the aftermath of the terror strike in Pulwama. Mr. Modi will hold a discussion with Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud, Minister of Energy, on Tuesday morning and follow it up with talks with Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and King Salman. He will deliver the keynote address at the Future Investment Summit organised by the Sovereign Wealth Fund of Saudi Arabia, the kingdom's public investment fund. Mr. Modi's last and most important meeting will be with the Crown Prince.

Mr. Modi's visit is significant as it comes three months after India ended the special status of Kashmir. Former Ambassador to Riyadh Talmiz Ahmed, however, feels that Kashmir is unlikely to get any attention from the Saudi rulers as the visit is expected to boost the Crown Prince's global stature which suffered after Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was brutally killed in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. "The visit is a vote of confidence in the leadership of Crown Prince bin Salman and it will be used to showcase that Saudi-India ties are determined by long-term strategic considerations like India's energy security and our desire to ensure stability in the Gulf region," Mr. Ahmad said.

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