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India, Kuwait boost ties: Strategic partnership, key pact on defence

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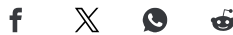
Written by Divya A

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi being awarded ‘The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer’ by Kuwait’s Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Sunday. (PTI)

AS PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and Kuwait’s Amir Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah held their first bilateral meeting on Sunday, the two countries elevated their relationship to a “strategic partnership” and signalled that trade and defence cooperation would form the key pillars of their ties.

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This came on the day that Kuwait conferred its highest honour — ‘The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer’ — on Modi for his role in strengthening the relations between the two countries.

Modi arrived in Kuwait on Saturday for a two-day visit — the first by an Indian PM in 43 years. The last Indian PM to visit Kuwait was Indira Gandhi in 1981. Modi was accompanied by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval.

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Besides the Amir, Modi also met Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, who hosted a banquet in his honour, and held delegation-level talks with Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad Abdullah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

The two sides institutionalised defence cooperation through an overarching agreement that includes training, exchange of personnel and experts, joint exercises, supply of defence equipment, and collaboration in research and development, among others.

Besides defence, three other MoUs (Memoranda of Understanding) were inked to facilitate cooperation in the areas of sports, culture and solar energy.

EXPLAINED

The next level

With a “strategic partnership”, India and Kuwait have given new momentum to bilateral ties. Kuwait is among India’s top trading partners, with bilateral trade valued at US\$ 10.47 billion in 2023-24. The Indian community forms the largest expatriate group in Kuwait.

Modi invited a delegation comprising the Kuwaiti Investment Authority and other stakeholders to visit India to look at new opportunities, including in the fields of energy, defence, medical devices, pharma, food parks, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

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During his meeting with Kuwait’s Amir, Modi also invited him to visit India. “Excellent meeting with His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad

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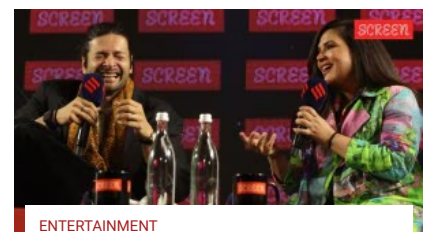
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Al-Jaber Al Sabah. We discussed cooperation in key sectors like pharmaceuticals, IT, FinTech, infrastructure and security,” Modi said in a post on X after the meeting.

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“In line with the close ties between our nations, we have elevated our partnership to a strategic one and I am optimistic that our friendship will flourish even more in the times to come,” he added.

While a strategic partnership entails greater cooperation in the areas already identified — pharmaceuticals, IT, fintech, infrastructure and security in this case — several new areas of cooperation will also be sought. In this regard, regular bilateral consultations, exchanges and visits pertaining to issues of mutual concern will be held.

Modi also thanked the Amir for ensuring the well-being of over one million Indians in Kuwait while the Kuwaiti leader expressed appreciation for the contribution of the community in the development journey of the Gulf nation.

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At their delegation-level talks, the two Prime Ministers discussed a roadmap to strengthen the strategic partnership in diverse areas including trade, investment, energy, defence, security, health, education, technology and people-to-people ties, according to the MEA.

At his meeting with the Crown Prince, Modi conveyed that India attaches utmost importance to its bilateral relations with Kuwait. “They emphasised on close coordination between both sides in the UN and other multilateral fora,” the MEA said.

In the meetings, the Indian side also showed keen interest in intensifying its cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) through Kuwait’s presidency of the influential grouping which includes the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar. The total volume of India’s trade with GCC countries stood at US\$ 184.46 billion in the financial year 2022-23. Both sides also stressed the importance of early conclusion of the India-GCC Free Trade Agreement.

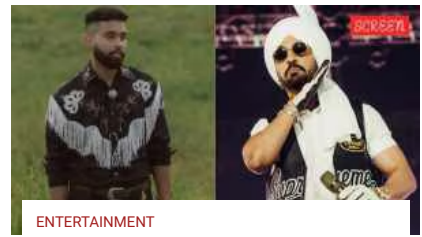
The MEA said Modi appreciated the new initiatives being undertaken by Kuwait to fulfill its ‘Vision 2035’ and congratulated the Amir for the successful holding of the GCC summit earlier this month.

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The Amir reciprocated Modi’s sentiments and expressed appreciation for India’s role as a valued partner in Kuwait and the Gulf region, the MEA said. It said the Kuwaiti leader looked forward to a greater role and contribution of India towards the realisation of Kuwait’s ‘Vision 2035’.

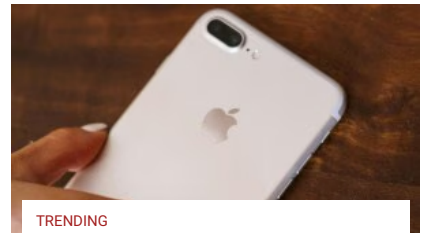
The Amir also conferred ‘The Order of Mubarak Al-Kabeer’ to Modi at the Bayan Palace. The award was given to Modi for strengthening the good relations between the two nations, Kuwait’s state-run news agency KUNA reported.

“I am honoured to be conferred the Mubarak Al-Kabeer Order by His Highness the Amir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al Sabah. I dedicate this honour



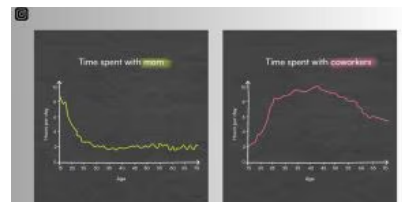
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to the people of India and to the strong friendship between India and Kuwait,” Modi said in a post on X.

Modi’s visit comes at a time when West Asia is still simmering — the two sides are expected to have discussed the situation during their talks. In his departure statement on Saturday morning, Modi had said the two sides “have shared interest in peace, security, stability and prosperity in the West Asia region”.

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A joint statement issued at the end of the visit said: “The two sides unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism, and called for disrupting of terrorism financing networks and safe havens, and dismantling of terror infrastructure.”

“The leaders expressed optimism that this renewed partnership would continue to grow, benefiting the people of both countries and contributing to regional and global stability,” it said.

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Divya A

Divya A reports on travel, tourism, culture and social issues - not necessarily in that order - for The Indian Express. She's been a journalist for over a decade now, worki [... Read More](#)



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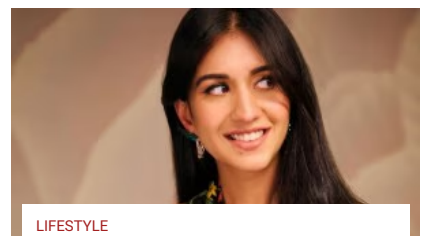
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