

Govt eyes investment pacts with S Arabia, UAE

ISLAMABAD: The government expects to sign investment agreements with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the coming weeks, the prime minister's office said, as Islamabad builds on its ties with states that have recently lent it billions of dollars.

A memorandum of understanding was expected with Saudi Arabia this month, with an investment framework accord set to be signed with the UAE in February, Prime Minister Imran Khan's office said in a statement following a meeting on Wednesday.

The MoUs follow a similar agreement signed last month with China, it said.

The statement gave no details but the daily Dawn newspaper quoted Board of Investment Chairman Haroon Sharif, as saying the investments were likely to be in the oil refining, petrochemicals, renewable energy and mining sectors.

"We are expecting \$10-billion-plus Saudi investments and the MoUs to be signed in this regard will not be common or vague but concrete agreements," Dawn quoted him as saying, adding that Saudi Aramco would invest in an oil refinery and also set up its own refinery in Pakistan.

Sharif said the UAE was interested in agriculture and housing investments and four Malaysian firms were interested in investments in the areas of halal meat, gemstones, information technology and hi-tech education.

The investments would be in addition to a \$6-billion package provided to Pakistan by Saudi Arabia and a similar-sized package, made up of loans and an oil payment credit facility, offered by the UAE.

The agreements come as Pakistan has sought to strengthen its public finances and reduce its current account deficit, which a report from the International Monetary Fund in November estimated to stand at 5.9 percent of gross domestic product in 2018.—Reuters