

Saudi royal's visit to pave way for strategic, economic relations: PM

ISLAMABAD: Describing the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman to Pakistan as a manifestation of the strength of bilateral relations, Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that it will go a long way in laying a foundation of strategic and economic relations that have been the hallmark of two brotherly countries.

The generous deposit of \$3 billion and supply of oil on deferred payment were reflective of the desire of the kingdom to see a strong, vibrant and prosperous Pakistan, he said in an interview published in the Saudi Gazette on Sunday.

The prime minister said that as the longstanding, firm and close relationship between the two countries extended to all spheres — political, economic and diplomatic — the crown prince's visit would strengthen Saudi Arabia's diplomatic support to Pakistan and reinforce ties.

He was confident that economic relations would be expanded by identifying new avenues of investment as well as joint ventures between the two countries.

In reply to a question about Riyadh's decision to establish an oil refinery in Gwadar, Mr Khan said Saudi Arabia as one of the leading producers of oil had tremendous experience in the energy market, which could benefit Pakistan in its quest for developing much-needed resources of energy.

Imran says Saudi investment in Gwadar refinery would be the most important contributor to making Pakistan self-reliant in the sector

The investment in Gwadar alone would be the most important contributor to making Pakistan self-reliant in this sector, he added.

The prime minister said Pakistan would like to develop an economic and cultural corridor with Saudi Arabia to further expand bilateral relations.

"Our relations with Saudi Arabia are not based on the exigencies of time but are time-tested," he said. "We hope that Saudi Arabia would invest in other sectors as well to bring the economic and trade relations on a par with our political relations."

Answering another question, PM Khan said the CPEC would not just be a corridor, as was indicated by his government's focus on the next phase of CPEC where they were going to focus on the Special Economic Zones. "We will focus on the indigenous production and industrialisation."

He said the government had initiated a broader and multi-dimensional reforms process to improve the investment climate in Pakistan and to make it an attractive destination for potential investors.

'Terrorism a big menace'

In response to a question about terrorism, the prime minister said terrorism was a big menace that had to be countered with an iron hand. Being the biggest victim of terrorism, Pakistan knew its ugliness and costs more than any other country in the world, he added.

The prime minister said Pakistan was against interference of regional powers in the internal affairs of any country.

The Islamic Military Counter Terror-ism Coalition (IMCTC) was a pioneering initiative of Saudi Arabia and the Muslim world to protect Muslim countries from growing security and terrorism threats, he added.

“The notion created by some that IMCTC is a coalition of vested interests against a particular country, region or sect, is a rustic mockery and far from any logic and reality. We hope this alliance will evolve into an alliance of all Muslim states to collectively fight the common menace of terrorism,” he added.

“Saudi Arabia is very close to our heart in every respect. It is only natural that Pakistan would always like to see it prosper in the most peaceful environment within and around its boundaries. We have always said if the Holy Cities of Islam are threatened, Pakistan would go all out to defend the Holy Cities,” he stressed.

In response to another question, the prime minister said it was Pakistan’s stated position that it would not allow anyone to attack Saudi Arabia. Pakistan will always stand by Saudi Arabia whenever it faces a threat in any form to its security and sovereignty. “We want Saudi Arabia as safe and secure as we want Pakistan to be,” he maintained.

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