**Another Productive Saudi Visit**

**Saudi Arabia’s warmth, France’s interest, and the Prime Minister’s tireless efforts offer a glimmer of hope for a country facing an uphill battle on multiple fronts.**

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Pakistan, with its striking landscapes and diverse climates, experiences snowfall primarily in its northern areas, while rainfall patterns vary dramatically across the country. Annual precipitation ranges from less than 100 mm in parts of the Lower Indus Plain to over 650 mm near the foothills of the Upper Indus Plain. Despite this, Pakistan remains heavily reliant on its three main rivers—the Kabul, Jhelum, and Chenab. Meanwhile, under the Indus Waters Treaty, the eastern tributaries—Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas—were handed over entirely to India. Although around 2.66 million acre-feet (MAF) of water flows from these rivers into Pakistan, alongside an additional 3.33 MAF of runoff generated domestically, this is woefully inadequate to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. The Kabul River, contributing 21 MAF, remains a crucial lifeline, but even this resource is stretched thin.

Globally, the water crisis is hitting a crescendo. The Water Resources Institute reports that 25% of the world’s population is under extreme water stress. Pakistan, with its prolonged dry spells and failure to store floodwater effectively, is among the worst-hit. This chronic neglect of water management is not just a logistical issue—it’s an existential one, threatening the heart of the nation’s agro-based economy. Imagine a country where fields that once thrived with wheat and rice now lie parched, and the future seems as uncertain as the rains themselves.

In this backdrop, Saudi Arabia, despite being one of the world’s most water-scarce nations, has shown remarkable leadership by hosting the “One Water Summit” in Riyadh. The summit, a collaborative effort with France, Kazakhstan, and the World Bank, brought together world leaders to discuss strategies for addressing water scarcity.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, representing Pakistan, made a compelling case for global cooperation to tackle this crisis. Describing water as the “lifeblood of the planet” and the cornerstone of economic growth and sustainability, he didn’t mince words about the challenges his country faces. Seventy percent of Pakistan’s land comprises arid and semi-arid regions, with nearly 30% of the population grappling with drought-like conditions. While the government has initiated plans such as “Recharge Pakistan” and a National Drought Plan to mitigate the crisis, the Prime Minister rightly pointed out that these initiatives need robust funding and advanced technology to be effective.

Shehbaz Sharif also highlighted the Indus Waters Treaty as a once-pragmatic example of transboundary cooperation but noted with alarm how this agreement is increasingly under threat. He accused India of systematically undermining Pakistan’s water rights by aggressively constructing storage facilities, even on rivers allocated to Pakistan. The question looms: how long can Pakistan endure this quiet water warfare without a stronger, united front on the international stage?

Beyond the summit, the Prime Minister’s two-day visit to Saudi Arabia was packed with high-stakes diplomacy. In a pivotal meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to elevating economic, trade, and investment ties between the two brotherly nations. The Crown Prince’s affection for Pakistan was evident, and his consistent engagement—six meetings with PM Shehbaz Sharif in six months—signals a genuine intent to bolster Pakistan’s struggling economy. With more Saudi investments expected in the coming months, one hopes these promises translate into tangible relief for Pakistan’s dire economic situation. The Prime Minister also held talks with French President Emmanuel Macron, where the two leaders explored opportunities for collaboration in agriculture, livestock, IT, and renewable energy. Macron, known for his pragmatic yet visionary approach, expressed interest in enhancing bilateral cooperation. PM Shehbaz Sharif, ever the optimist, encouraged French businesses to tap into Pakistan’s untapped potential, particularly in climate adaptation and clean energy. It’s heartening to see such dialogues, but one cannot help but wonder—will Pakistan’s internal bureaucratic inertia allow these opportunities to flourish, or will they remain buried under red tape?

In his first and ongoing tenure since April 2022, PM Shehbaz Sharif has undertaken over three dozen foreign visits to 15 countries. While critics may grumble about the frequency of these trips, they overlook the importance of diplomacy in a world where alliances and partnerships can make or break a country’s future. Every handshake, every MoU, every polite exchange of pleasantries contributes to shaping Pakistan’s place on the global stage.

Saudi Arabia’s warmth, France’s interest, and the Prime Minister’s tireless efforts offer a glimmer of hope for a country facing an uphill battle on multiple fronts. But these efforts must be matched with domestic reforms, efficient execution of projects, and a renewed focus on sustainability. As the Prime Minister returns from yet another productive visit, one can only hope that his government’s promises begin to resonate not just in foreign capitals but in the lives of ordinary Pakistanis waiting for change.

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