**Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and New Horizons**

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On September 23, 2022, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) will celebrate its 92nd Saudi National Day with great zeal and vigour. The largest ever celebrations in the history of the Kingdom will be witnessed by the world. Among many festivities, a major air show will be held in 13 major cities across the Kingdom which will feature 34 events. Under the slogan “A homeland salute”, Saudi fighter jets, and military and civilian aircrafts will take part in them.

The fervour with which the Saudi nationals are taking part in the celebrations is also evident from the fact that more than 1 million people have registered with its National Volunteer Portal for the national day, according to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development. It also marks the achievement of one of the goals of the Saudi Vision 2030 which “encourages volunteer work… and the goal of reaching one million volunteers in 2030.” An important member of the G-20, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is now the world’s 18th largest economy. It stands at the number one spot in the Arab world and the Middle East, owing to a stable government system which has helped achieve stable economic growth. Under the leadership of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques; King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Kingdom has much to celebrate. In 2022, Saudi Arabia is poised to become the world’s fastest-growing major economy, outperforming China, India and other emerging economies. The Kingdom has successfully overcome the pandemic-induced recession and its economic indicators are headed in a positive direction.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is set to become a trillion-dollar economy this year. According to forecasts by the IMF, the economy will grow by 7.6% over the year as a whole, taking Saudi GDP up to $1,040 billion. This is no ordinary achievement, and will also give a big boost to Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman’s Vision 2030, which aimed to expand the Kingdom’s economy to $1.7 trillion by 2030, by introducing a reform strategy.

Pakistan, being an important strategic ally and a brotherly country, can also offer a number of services to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which align with Vision 2030.

Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman’s Vision 2030 for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, first introduced in 2016, is a far-reaching and pragmatic blueprint for transforming his nation into an international economic power. The Vision is based on three ‘pillars’; ‘the status of the Kingdom as the heart of the Islamic world’; ‘the determination to become a global investment powerhouse’; and, becoming a ‘global hub connecting three continents, Asia, Europe and Africa’.

Owing to these reforms, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has truly become a pluralistic, tolerant, and socially liberal society. The increase in the female workforce in recent years has been encouraging and in line with the Kingdom’s Vision 2030, which aimed to increase the employment rate among Saudi women to 30%. As a result of consistent efforts and supportive policies, Saudi Arabia’s total female workforce participation has risen to 33.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2022 from 20.5 per cent in the same period in 2019, according to a report released by Monsha’at. The World Bank report “Women, Business, and the Law 2020” recognized Saudi Arabia as the top reformer globally in the last year.

Being an important member of the world community, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognizes the dangers posed by climate change to the globe. In light of it, the Kingdom announced the creation of the Saudi Green Initiative. At the inaugural Saudi Green Initiative Forum, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia announced two major emissions reduction goals as part of its efforts to lead the way in the global energy transition. Under this initiative, the Kingdom aims to reduce carbon emissions by 278 mtpa by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2060, while maintaining and ensuring sustainable development.

This progress that we see today being made by the Kingdom in the socioeconomic sphere is not surprising. It is a result of years of planning, careful execution and monitoring. There are several lessons which Pakistan can learn from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s socioeconomic transformational experiences. Foremost of them being policy planning and their successful execution.

Saudi Arabia is home to more than 2.5 million Pakistani expatriates and one of the biggest sources of remittances to Pakistan. Recently, Pakistan became the first beneficiary of the newly launched Saudi skilled verification program for workers. Under this scheme, Pakistani workers can get contracts directly from Saudi companies without needing a sponsor. This step will enhance opportunities for Pakistani workers in the Kingdom, and the Kingdom can benefit from their expertise.

History is witness that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always extended a hand of help towards Pakistan and its people, in their time of need. Be it the 2005 earthquake or the 2010 floods, KSA was among the first countries to offer humanitarian aid and assistance. This time is no different. As the recent floods have ravaged 2/3rd of Pakistan, affecting more than 33 million people and has killed over 1,500 Pakistanis, Saudi Arabia’s King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center has launched a campaign to provide assistance to Pakistan by establishing an air bridge for relief operations in the flood-hit country.

The floods have cost more than 30 billion dollars in damages which Pakistan’s ravaged economy could not sustain. But fortunately, they were lent a hand of support by the Kingdom. As the State Bank of Pakistan stated that the Saudi Fund for Development has decided to extend a $3 billion deposit currently placed in the bank’s accounts for one year. This move is set to improve the confidence of investors in the country.

It is evident that the Kingdom has offered Pakistan support and cooperation on a number of matters. But Pakistan, being an important strategic ally and a brotherly country, can also offer a number of services to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in different sectors which align with the Kingdom’s vision 2030. Pakistan’s booming IT industry, financial services, insurance sector, facilities management and entertainment industry can benefit Saudi Arabia as they look forward to developing mega projects such as NEOM, Amala, Red Sea, Qiddiya and Diriyah Gate. KSA can also benefit from Pakistan’s strength of its manufacturing base or products like state-of-the-art surgical equipment, the halal food market (frozen, fresh, organic), world-class sports goods, textiles as well as value-added garments, to name a few.

Undoubtedly, the People of Pakistan have a great reverence and strong religious and cultural affinity with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Close geographical proximity, historic trade ties and economic facilitation have developed trustworthy relations based on mutual respect. The people of Pakistan greatly appreciated the recent Joint Communiqué of the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir, held on the sidelines of the session of the UN General Assembly, which demanded that India must reverse all illegal and unilateral measures it took on or after August 5, 2019, and its actions were inconsistent with international law and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

Pakistan must continue to work together with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to further strengthen the bond between the two states. By standing together, Pakistan and the Kingdom can become a shining example of relations within the Muslim Ummah.

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