



Royal welcome: Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the New Delhi airport on Tuesday. ■AP

PM, Saudi Crown Prince to discuss cross-border terror

Breaking protocol, Modi receives Salman at airport

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In a special gesture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday received Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the airport here, signifying the importance India attaches to the visit by the leader of the powerful Gulf nation.

The Crown Prince arrived here on a visit for under 30 hours, a day after concluding his high-profile tour of Pakistan where he said dialogue was the only way to resolve "outstanding issues" between India and Pakistan. According to the External Affairs Ministry, the Crown Prince will leave here around 11.50 p.m. on Wednesday.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Raveesh Kumar tweeted, "A new chapter in bilateral relations. Breaking protocol, PM @narendramodi personally receives HRH Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, Crown

Prince of Saudi Arabia as he arrives on his first bilateral visit to India!"

The Saudi leader, who returned to Riyadh from Pakistan, and Mr. Modi will hold extensive talks on Wednesday during which India is likely to raise strongly the issue of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Salman are expected to look at ways to enhance defence ties, including holding a joint naval exercise, official sources said.

His visit comes against the backdrop of the escalating tension between India and Pakistan following the Pulwama terror attack carried out by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror group in which 40 CRPF were killed.

In a joint statement, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia on Monday called for avoiding "politicisation" of the UN listing regime at a time when India was stepping up efforts to brand the JeM terror

group's chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.

Saudi Arabia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir said in Islamabad that Riyadh would try to "de-escalate" tensions between India and Pakistan in the wake of the Pulwama attack.

Official sources said Saudi Arabia was no longer accepting Pakistan's narrative on Kashmir and cross-border terrorism and that India would forcefully raise the issue of Pakistan's support to terror groups during delegation-level talks between Mr. Modi and the Crown Prince.

They said the joint statement to be issued after talks between the two sides is likely to have strong reference about terrorism and ways to deal with it.

Official sources said there has been a "change" in the way Saudi Arabia looked at relations between India and Pakistan and that the powerful Gulf nation had a better understanding of the cross-border terrorism.