

MEETING FROM JAN 31 Some of the prominent items on the agenda are the prevailing conflict in West Asia, Palestine issue & counterterrorism

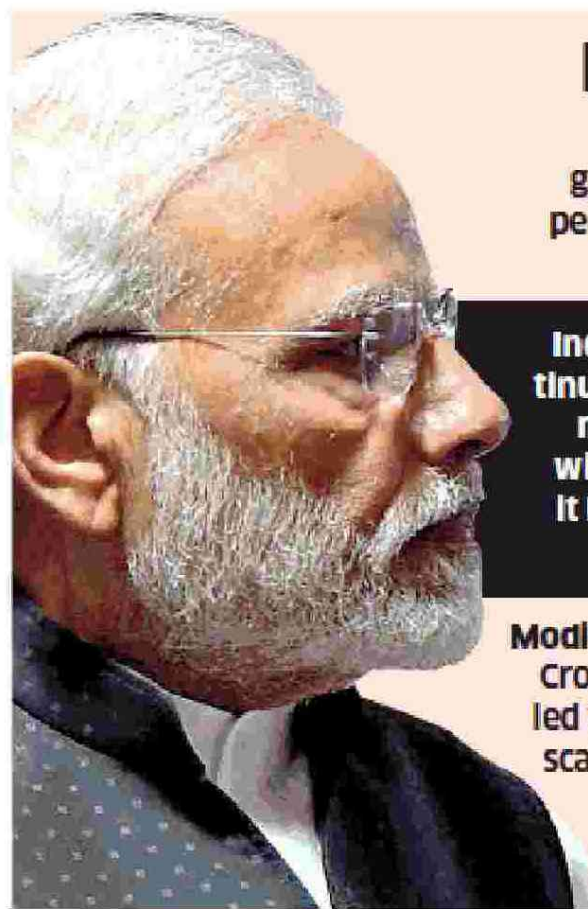
India to Host 22 Arab League Nations At a Two-day Meeting

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New Delhi: India will host foreign ministers of 22 Arab League nations in Delhi at a two-day meet from January 31 in the first such engagement in recent years with the grouping of West Asian and North African countries, and the State of Palestine. If Syria is admitted to the grouping in the intervening period it could be among the participants at the meet, said people aware of the matter.

They said that India's initiative signals continuation of the Narendra Modi government's efforts to boost ties with the Arab world even as it has separately stepped up engagement with Israel. Prominent items on the agenda of the meet are the prevailing conflict in West Asia, Palestine issue, counterterrorism, defence partnership, Indian energy interests and welfare of diaspora, said one of the persons, who did not wish to be identified.

Syria's membership of the Arab League was suspended in 2011. But India, one of the five observer members of the grouping, maintained its diplomatic mission in Damascus and continued its counterterrorism co-



Reaching Out

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Since 2015, India has been engaging more intensely with the Arab World, with the PM and external affairs minister undertaking several visits to the region and hosting its leaders

operation and economic ties with the country. Syria, on its part, has been against a strong anti-India position on Kashmir in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Some other Arab League member states, which are also OIC members, have also favoured a similar position on the Kashmir issue.

Since 2015, India has been engaging more intensely with the Arab World, with the Prime Minister and external affairs minister undertaking several visits to the region and hosting its leaders including the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince at the 2017 Republic Day celebrations. Modi, preceded by the then President Pranab Mukherjee, also visited Palestine, the first Indian PM to do so.

While India de-hyphenated ties with Israel and the Arab World, with Modi becoming the first Indian PM to visit Israel and later hosting PM Benjamin Netanyahu within six months of his visit, the country also elevated ties with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and Jordan to the next level. Modi's recent meeting with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia led to a decision on the part of Saudi Arabia to scale up investments in India.