



The visit of King Abdullah of Jordan to India: Its Meanings and Implications

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The presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the airport to receive King Abdullah of Jordan at the end of February (27 February-01 March, 2018) was a manifestation and further reinforcement of the Prime Minister's four years of deep engagement with West Asia. King Abdullah's visit was long due after former President Pranab Mukherjee had visited the kingdom in 2015 and invited him to make a state visit to India. Also, in this February, Prime Minister Modi (after Rajiv Gandhi's visit in 1988) became the first Indian Prime Minister in three decades to land in Jordan while on his three-nation tour in the region.

Modi's presence at the airport was a reciprocal gesture on his part to the grand reception he was accorded by the King at his royal residence - a break from the past tradition of receiving dignitaries at his office alone. The short visit of the Prime Minister to Jordan was termed by the King as the beginning of a new chapter in bilateral relationship. He had also affirmed India's important role in enhancing security, stability and combating terrorism.¹ During his three-day stay in India, King Abdullah met the President, Vice President and Prime Minister apart from interacting with the external affairs minister and participating in FICCI-CEO roundtable and India-Jordan business forum organized by ICCI, FICCI and ASSOCHAM. On top of all these was his special joint address to Muslim intellectuals and civil society member on promoting and understanding moderation in Islam with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. There were primarily three major components of King Abdullah's visit to India: economic and political, defense and combating radicalism.

Urge for New Level of Economic Ties:

The importance of the King's visit can be inferred from the fact that during the visit a total 12 MoUs were signed between the two countries. This number is the highest in comparison with any West Asian nation since Prime Minister Modi became Prime Minister in 2014. The main agreements signed between the two sides include the spheres of trade, investment, industry, education, agriculture, mineral exploration and IT. A major component of the king's visit to India

related to trade, commerce and investment. During his three-day visit, the king was accompanied by a huge business delegation representing different sectors of the Jordanian economy like tourism, real estate, transport, communications, IT, energy and renewable energy, health , food processing , olive production and infrastructure.

As a part of exploring further business prospects with India and in search of know-how, the King participated in a CEOs' roundtable and an India-Jordan Business Forum organized jointly by the Jordan Chamber of Commerce, FICCI, and ICCI. He also visited IIT, Delhi. Mr. Mazin , one of the Arab analysts, said that Jordan can learn a lot from the success story of the Indian economy and its stunning economic rise should be a model for Jordan. He further said that it is only because of talent that Indians are placed in top positions in more than 500 US companies. What helps the Indian economy is its democratic stability, and change of government does not derail economic progress as every political dispensation works for the economic advancement.²

During his address to the Jordan-India Business Forum, the primary message of the King to the Indian investors was that the kingdom would lay a red carpet without red tapism for them. He invited Indian investment companies to invest in different economic sectors of Jordan and assured that companies investing there would face no political or bureaucratic hurdles. He said that this Jordan-India Business Forum can be a platform to develop new business ideas and explore new business opportunities between two nations and Jordan free trade agreement with many nations could provide golden opportunities for many of us present here.³ It is worth mentioning here that Jordan has more Free Trade Agreements than any other Arab country. It has FTAs with the European Union, the United States, Canada and many nations of South East Asia like Singapore, Malaysia._He also said that amidst the huge challenge of instability, it becomes more important for people from across cultural boundaries to come closer, and trade and business could be a major means to achieve this.

Jordan's finance minister said that Indian manufacturers can establish manufacturing units in Jordan and utilize the country's strategic location and thus benefit from Jordan's free trade agreement with the US, other western countries and African and Gulf nations. The vice president of the Jordan Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Jagheer said that investment in Jordan would be an opportunity for Indian companies to reach out to the West Asian, European and African markets as well. Indian products can be sent to Europe by Jordanian businessmen because of its free trade agreement with many countries.

Total trade (US \$ million) between India and Jordan in last five years⁴

Years	India's Export to Jordan	India's Import from Jordan	Total Trade
2012	US \$ 757.2	US \$ 131.8	US \$ 889.0

2013	US \$ 1697.9	US \$ 682.8	US \$ 2380.7
2014	US \$ 1613.1	US \$ 789.3	US \$2402.4
2015	US \$ 535.1	US \$ 870.4	US \$1405.5
2016	US \$ 460.9	US \$ 839.7	US \$ 1300.6

India is the fourth largest exporter of goods to Jordan after US, Saudi Arabia and China and third largest importer of Jordan goods after US and Saudi Arabia. It is worth mentioning here that already twenty Indian textile companies have invested in Jordan to the tune of US \$ 300 million. In last three years ((2015-2017) the total size of Indian investments in Jordan has increased from US \$ 337 million to US \$ 439 million which is primarily in fertilizers and textiles sector. The Jordan state minister of investment and industry told the Arab media that the time has come for Jordan to diversify its export base to India as the country in recent years has emerged as one of the largest economies and markets as well. Items of Jordanian export to India do not exceed the confines of fertilizers and chemical products. During this visit, Jordan Phosphate Company signed six agreements with different Indian companies to export the rock phosphate to Indian markets and another Jordanian company has signed an agreement to export fertilizers to India; and, both agreements would be implemented this year itself.⁵ In addition to that, Arab Potash Company and Indian Potash Limited (biggest buyer of Jordanian Potash in India) signed another MoU by which Arab Potash Company would supply 370,000 metric tons of potash to the Indian company. For Jordanian potash, India is the biggest market in the world because of its huge requirement in India's agriculture sector.

In last three years, Jordan's imports of Indian goods have substantially declined due to poor economic performance of the country on account of persisting political instability and deteriorating security situations in the region. But unlike Jordan's imports from India, Jordan's exports to India has constantly increased in last five years and in year 2016 it reached to US \$ 839.7 million from US \$ 131.8 million in year 2012.⁶ The main items of India's exports to Jordan include electrical machinery, cereals, frozen meat, organic and inorganic chemicals, animal fodder, engineering and automotive parts while Jordan's primary exports to India consists of natural calcium phosphate, natural aluminum phosphate, chemical fertilizers, aluminum waste and scrap and phosphatic chalk.⁷

The tourism sector too has witnessed a major boost and the number of Indian tourists increased by 28% during the last one year.⁸ This rise has been possible because of easing of visa restriction for Indian tourists in recent years.

Apart from seeking investment and diversifying and enhancing its exports to India, Jordan is interested in seeking know-how from India, particularly in the field of communication and information technology. The king's visit to IIT was indicative of this new urge of Jordan which is also seeking Indian assistance in the field of higher education. During the visit of President Mukherjee in 2015, ten MoUs were signed between different universities of India and Jordan and

other educational and cultural exchange programmes were also initiated. This time as well, an MoU has been signed between Jordan university and ICCR to establish a chair for the teaching of Hindi language.⁹

Like the economic-centric visit of President Mukerjee in 2015 when a joint India-Jordan Business Forum was created to boost economic ties, this time too the focus was on economy and trade. Jordan's export market to neighboring nations too has shrunk profoundly because of the turmoil in the region. Its export to Syria - the biggest destination for Jordanian goods - has suffered heavily because of instability on the border due to refugee flows and other security issues.¹⁰ Moreover, the presence of a large number of refugees from across the border has caused heavy damage to the national economy.

New Framework for Defense Cooperation:

Among all the MoUs signed between Jordan and India, the MoU on defense and security cooperation is of special significance. The defense and security cooperation envisages cooperation in military training, defense industry, counter terrorism, military studies, cyber security, military medical services and peace keeping. After signing such a comprehensive defense deal, Jordan has become the seventh country in West Asia and the fifth in the Arab world with which India has signed such a comprehensive agreement in the field of defense.¹¹ The other countries with which India had signed such a comprehensive defense deal include Egypt, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman and Israel¹²

India too wants to seek Jordan's assistance in the sphere of intelligence and security network because Jordan has one of the most capable security apparatus in the region.¹³ When the whole of West Asia is engulfed in terrorism and is facing the worst security and stability crisis in recent history, Jordan stands as a bastion of political stability. This has been possible essentially because of its advanced intelligence gathering and sharing system.

Jordan's strategic location accords it a special status as it shares borders with six countries in the WANA region : Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia; and, all these nations are in term oil in one way or another, and any instability there will further aggravate the situation. The defense agreement with Jordan might be of great help to India and India can have a strategic imprint in the region of the Red Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean through the Levant. During the short visit of Prime Minister Modi to Palestine, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas had exhorted India to play an active role in resolving the Arab-Israel conflict; and, that would not be possible without India's close association with Jordan because the country is legally, culturally and religiously integral to Palestine. The US and the Russia too have signed security agreements with Jordan, given its strategic location and the expanding war in its neighborhood. On the political front, both Jordan and Israel have signed many diplomatic and cultural agreements to ease the relationship between two nations and, moreover, Jordan's strategic and military ties with Israel could help India because India too is developing deep strategic ties with Israel.



War against Terrorism and Radical Ideologies:

A critical highlight of the King's visit was his address to religious figures, Muslim intellectuals and members of civil society in Delhi where he spoke on Islamic moderation. The King's lecture primarily focused on Islamic moderation and was an endeavor to advocate religious tolerance and restraint among the youth and to dissuade them from Islamic fanaticism. It was also an explicit message that merely security, defense or anti-terror cooperation and agreements would not resolve the menace of terrorism and it needs to be fought on the ideological and societal front as well by promoting an inclusive Islam and promoting the true legacy of Islam.

In his address to religious figures representing different sects and group of Islam in the presence of Prime Minister Modi, he said that "what we are watching and hearing on social media and other forum is dividing people and that is happening because of our ignorance about each other". He further said that religion leads us towards prosperity and progress through interaction among different cultural and civilizational groups where one should focus on common human ideals preached in all religions.¹⁴ Acknowledging and respecting the religion of each other is a principle of Islam and of all the 1.8 billion Muslims across the world who understand the true spirit and meaning of Islam", he stressed. The King also said in his remarks that the facility of internet and social media should be taken away from those who are using it to spread hatred and radical ideas and ideology because they are not killing people by bombs and explosion but by killing their human instincts. He said the global war against terrorism is not between religions but between moderates and extremists.¹⁵

Prime Minister Modi also spoke on the occasion and said that the huge presence of Indian religious figures on the occasion testified that they have full faith in the King's mission of war against radicalism, extremism and terrorism. What was more unique about his address was his

invocation of his Hashemite identity - the name of the Prophet's Clan – which, of course, accords special value to any Islamic discourse emanating from the ruling family of Jordan.

This is not for the first time that the King has chosen India or such a joint podium to take about moderate Islam and how both the nations can combat radicalism and terrorism because of their common historical values and legacy of religious pluralism and tradition of tolerance. When former President Pranab Mukherjee had visited Jordan in 2015 (maiden visit by any Indian head of state to Jordan) , the king had then said , “We are facing the biggest challenge today in the form of terrorism and extremism and we would like to discuss the issue with our friends in India and to adopt a united stance against this global menace called terrorism.....This is a hazard that has entered the religion of Islam and this is an issue common with all religions and we can assure our support to India in this regard”.¹⁶ Jordan is known for promotion of moderate views on Islam and like many nations of West African (Tunisia and Morocco), it too sends its clergy and religious scholars to preach moderate Islam.¹⁷

Amman has remained at the forefront of the war against terror and it was among the first few nations which had foreseen its threat and developed a comprehensive mechanism for dealing with it. It is worth mentioning here that Amman's Message: A Theological Counter-Attack against Terrorism (2005) was the first major initiative on the part of King Abdullah to combat terrorism. It was the most comprehensive account which was prepared with the participation of 170 Ulema and spiritual figures from across forty Arab nations to condemn terrorism in the name of Islam.

Jordan, being one of the earliest voices on Islamic terrorism, could be of great help to India because India is one of the oldest victims of terrorism and its voices and concerns in this regard in the past have been ignored. Today, Jordan is facing an unprecedented level of terror challenges and it is under direct threat from ISIS and other terror groups and reportedly in 2014, there were 2000 Jordanians among the foreign fighters who had flocked to the ISIS in Iraq and Syria. It is hosting the largest number of refugees after Turkey and Lebanon and that has rendered it more vulnerable on many the economic and security fronts.

Jordan is the custodian of the holy mosque in Jerusalem and its ruling Hashemite family is a descendent of the Prophet Mohammad which accords it a unique standing among the global Muslim community when it comes to any deliberation on Islam or Islamic discourse which today continues to occupy a central place in world politics. Various geographical locations mentioned in the Quran can be found in today's Jordan. Jordan is a leading voice on moderate Islam and can be of great help to India because India hosts the largest number of Muslims in the world after Indonesia and Bangladesh. Moreover, India and Jordan share a common history, civilizational values and norms which can bring the two nations together more easily than other commonalities. Both adhere to the philosophy of cultural and religious plurality and religious tolerance as India and Jordan historically have been home to religious and cultural minorities. Of late both the nations have emerged among the biggest voice on anti-radicalism and both are fighting the menace in their own way. One of the Arab experts said that Jordan should learn from

⁴ World Integrated Trade Solution Wwebsite accessed

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/IND/StartYear/2012/EndYear/2016/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/OR/Indicator/MPRT-TRD-VL> on April 24, 2018

⁵ <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1192381/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%80-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

⁶ World Integrated Trade Solution Wwebsite accessed

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/IND/StartYear/2012/EndYear/2016/TradeFlow/Import/Partner/OR/Indicator/MPRT-TRD-VL> on April 24, 2018

⁷ Global export import market intelligence , accessed <https://www.infodriveindia.com/india-trading-partners/jordan-imports.aspx> on 22 April 2018

⁸ <https://almejharnews.com/archives/31658>

⁹ MEA site on MoU and agreement, accessed [http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29527/List of MoUsAgreements signed during the Visit of the King of Jordan to India March 2018](http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29527/List%20of%20MoUsAgreements%20signed%20during%20the%20Visit%20of%20the%20King%20of%20Jordan%20to%20India%20March%2022%202018) on March 22 2018

¹⁰ Al-Arab, An Arabic daily, February 27, 2018 , accessed

<https://alarab.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B9-%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-> on March 22 2018

¹¹ MEA site on MoU and agreement, accessed [http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29527/List of MoUsAgreements signed during the Visit of the King of Jordan to India March 2018](http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29527/List%20of%20MoUsAgreements%20signed%20during%20the%20Visit%20of%20the%20King%20of%20Jordan%20to%20India%20March%2022%202018) on March 22 2018

¹² Manjari Singh, Takeaway form King Abdullah’s Visit to India, MEI, New Delhi, Accessed <http://www.mei.org.in/commentary473>

¹³ <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1192381/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%80-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

¹⁴ <http://alrai.com/article/10427132/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83-%D9%8A%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%83-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%A4%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF>

¹⁵ <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1192381/%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%80-%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%B2-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9>

¹⁶ <http://www.jbcnews.net/article/154737-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%84%D9%83-%D8%B9%D8%A8%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%B1%D8%A6%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86>

¹⁷ <https://www.raialyoom.com/index.php/%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AD-%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B7-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9/>

¹⁸ Almajhar al Ikhbari, An Arabic Daily, accessed <https://almejharnews.com/archives/31658> on April 22 2018