



TOPIC OF THE WEEK

FEB'18 (15 to 21)

Topic: Pm Modi's Visit to Palestine

On February 9, 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled from New Delhi to Jordanian Capital Amman and took a chopper ride to reach the Palestinian city of Ramallah (a city in West Bank is home to Palestinian's Authority's presidential headquarters and also serves as Palestine's de facto capital). Narendra Modi is the first Indian Prime Minister to make an official visit to Palestine in 30 years.

India and Palestine, on February 10 2018 signed, six Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) for cooperation, in the field of infrastructural development in Palestine. All the agreements signed between the two countries were handed over to the Palestinian side by the Foreign Secretary Vijay K Gokhale. Palestine was the first leg of PM Modi's three-nation tour of West Asia and the Gulf that will also see him travelling to United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman.

On February 10, 2018, India and Palestine signed following six agreements in different areas including health and education:

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

- MoU for setting up of India-Palestine Super Specialty hospital at Beit Sahour in Bethlehem Governate
- MoU for construction of India-Palestine Centre for empowering women
- MoU for setting up of a new National Printing Press at Ramallah
- MoU for construction of school in Muthalth Al Shuhada Village
- MoU for construction of school in Tamoon Village in Tubas Governate
- MoU for providing assistance for construction of additional floor to Jawaharlal Nehru for boys at Abu Dees

India has also secured access to key strategic Port of Duqm in Oman in Arabian Sea for military use and logistical support. This was one of the key takeaways of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oman.

The February 9-12 trip comes within a month of the visit to India by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

that saw the two countries hailing each other as a strategic partner despite New Delhi's long-standing support for the Palestinian cause.

In a special recognition of Modi's contribution to relations between India and Palestine, the PM was conferred the "Grand Collar of the State of Palestine" by the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The grand collar is highest order given to foreign dignitaries - Kings, Heads of State/Government and persons of similar rank.

During this visit, annexure to Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Military Cooperation was signed between the two countries. Following this pact, the services of Duqm port and dry dock will be available for maintenance of Indian military vessels.

The Port of Duqm is strategically located situated on southeastern seaboard of Oman, overlooking Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. It is straddled along critical sea lanes in Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden. The port also has special economic zone, where about \$1.8 billion investments are being made by some Indian companies.

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

This MoU will further expand India's footprint in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). This will strengthen India's maritime strategy to counter Chinese influence and activities in the region. The access to Duqm port fits into India's proactive maritime security roadmap along with development string of military facilities at Assumption Island in Seychelles and Agalega in Mauritius to counter China's increasing presence. It also recognizes India and Oman's common responsibility towards promoting regional peace and security. It will further cement bilateral strategic engagement especially in the areas of security and defence between both countries.

India and Oman had signed MoU on Military Cooperation in 2005 and renewed it in 2016. It has provided the general framework to strengthen bilateral defence ties. Moreover, MoUs on cooperation in maritime security and between Coast Guards of the two countries signed in May 2016 have provided a firm foundation for deepening institutional interactions. Recently, Duqm Port had seen rise in Indian activities.

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

In September 2017, India had deployed attack Shishumar-class submarine along with naval ship INS Mumbai and two P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft to this port in the western Arabian Sea with the aim of enhancing surveillance and cooperation.

On Friday, Modi met Jordan's King Abdullah II and said he had "wonderful" meeting that would further boost India-Jordan ties. The King, meanwhile, described the meeting as the beginning of a new chapter in the bilateral ties.

Talks between the two sides covered the Palestinian cause, and Jordan's role in protecting Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, based on the Hashemite custodianship over the holy shrines, Jordan's state-run Petra news agency reported.

The talks, which were attended by acting Prime Minister Mamdouh Abbadi, focused on coordination and consultation between the two countries in various fields, as the King highlighted the key role played by India in promoting security, stability and fighting terrorism. In

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

order to deepen the engagement, India and Palestine had undertaken the first ever historic ministerial level joint commission meeting in November 2016. Both sides agreed to deepen their engagement in several areas including health, IT, tourism, youth affairs, sports, agriculture.

However, Modi's visit to Ramallah comes at a time when the US has taken a stance to recognise the disputed territory of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel unilaterally while India chose to vote in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution opposing the move made by Washington.

Interestingly, unlike his visit to Israel in July last year, Prime Minister Modi will visit Palestine only for a few hours. He will leave for Abu Dhabi on Saturday night. This is contrary to his three-day visit to Israel where he had several engagements.

"Prime Minister Modi needs to make it clear that India gives out a strong political message that Jerusalem is under military control and is a disputed territory. India has to reject America's designs on the issue," said

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

Former Ambassador of India to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE, Talmiz Ahmad.

The Modi government has also sought to ramp up India's engagement with West Asia and the rest of the Arab world as it seeks to attract foreign investment.

While India's ties with the Gulf have been fostered by previous governments too, Mr. Modi has paid particular attention to the region, and this was seen as part of efforts to redefine ties.

Said Mr. Raveesh Kumar, a Ministry of External Affairs spokesman, at a recent press briefing on the Prime Minister's visit to West Asia: "We are looking at redefining our neighbourhood, looking at our neighbourhood not only from the land perspective but also from the maritime perspective."

Mr. Kumar added that ties with the Gulf countries were not just about the large Indian population but also an effort "to broad base our engagement with these countries into moving towards a more strategic sphere

Week: 15th to 21st Feb2018

both on trade and investment as well as on defence and security".

Suggested Reading:

- ✓ <http://www.news18.com/news/opinion/prime-minister-narendra-modi-in-palestine-india-is-dealing-with-israel-and-palestine-independently-without-third-party-complications-1656589.html>
- ✓ <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-narendra-modi-starts-historic-palestine-visit-tomorrow-focus-health-infrastructure-5056827/>
- ✓ <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/narendra-modi-first-indian-pm-palestine-visit-jawaharlal-nehru>