

## Modi in Ramallah today, to discuss peace process

Narendra Modi at Queen Alia International Airport in Amman on Friday. PTI/PTI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his three-nation West Asia tour on Friday with a stopover in the Jordanian capital, Amman, where he met King Abdullah II.

On Saturday, Mr. Modi will travel to Ramallah in the West Bank, the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, where he will hold talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Mr. Modi is the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Ramallah.

At Jordan's Queen Alia International Airport, the Prime Minister was welcomed by Acting Prime Minister Mamdouh Abbadi, Minister of State for Investment Affairs Muhannad Shehadeh, Amman Mayor Yousef Shawarbeh, the Indian Ambassador in Amman and a number of civic and military officials, according to Jordan's Petra News Agency. Jordan's Indian community representatives also greeted him.

"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," Petra reported.

Later, Mr. Modi thanked the Jordanian King. "Landed in Amman. I thank His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan for facilitating the transit," Mr. Modi tweeted. "Had a wonderful meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. Our discussions today will give great strength to India-Jordan bilateral relations," he said in another tweet, posted both in Arabic and English.

In Ramallah, bilateral issues and the Israeli-Palestine peace process will be discussed by Mr. Modi and Mr. Abbas, Palestinian officials in Ramallah said.

### Abbas's view

Earlier in an interview, Mr. Abbas said they would discuss the possible role India could play in the peace process. "We will discuss the recent updates with Prime Minister Modi, and the recent developments in the peace process, the bilateral relations, and the regional situations. And the possible role India can play in enhancing peace in the region, as well as discussing different economical aspects beyond the existing ties we already possess," he said.

In Ramallah, the Prime Minister will lay a wreath on the tomb of late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, tour the Arafat museum (both are located on the Palestinian Presidential Secretariat premises), hold bilateral discussions and have lunch with the Palestinian leader. "All programmes will be held in Muqata (Presidential compound). The PM is unlikely to travel elsewhere in Ramallah," one Indian diplomat said.

The visit comes weeks after Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to New Delhi. In July last year, Mr. Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel. Indian diplomats say the visit to Ramallah through Jordan without crossing through any of the Israeli checkpoints is consistent with India's "de-hyphenation policy".

A Palestinian Liberation Organisation leader said India's growing ties with Israel could benefit the Palestinians. "The growing ties between them could be positive, because now India has more leverage with Israel and can pressure it in our favour," Ahmad Majdalani, a PLO Executive Committee member, told *The Jerusalem Post*.

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