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Analysing India-Morocco Relations in the Post Arab Uprising Era

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the recent impetus of India-Morocco relations in the post Arab uprising phase, particularly against the backdrop of III-India Africa Forum Summit (III-IAFS) held in 2015 in New Delhi. Morocco is an emerging nation and its growing socio-political and economic importance especially in the African region attracted India's attention. Hence India decided to extend its invitation for III-IAFS to Morocco despite facing disagreement from some African Union members. This decision played a crucial role in re-invigorating India- Morocco relations in recent times. King Mohammed VI met with the Indian Prime minister, on the sidelines of III-IAFS and both the countries agreed to elevate their bilateral ties. The current momentum of positivity between India and Morocco bolstered by a series of high-level ministerial visits and signing of key agreements in areas of mutual interests such as counter-terrorism, climate change, culture, tourism, research and training, etc. Morocco has successfully survived the unprecedented Arab uprising and emerged as a success story this makes the monarchy a potential and stable partner for India. Morocco's stand on counter-terrorism and climate change is another vital aspect of attraction as both the countries share similar views on these issues. Besides that Morocco's close economic ties with many African countries is a notable incentive for India. The rapid expansion of China in Africa poses a possible threat to India's free drive in the African region that can be contained by forging a close association with Morocco which enjoys Free Trade Agreements with many Sub-Saharan countries. Moreover, Morocco's full support to India's ambition for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council is another bonus for India. On the other hand Morocco's congeniality towards India is motivated by two predominant factors of Moroccan foreign policy: first the issue of Western Sahara and second the economic constraints. The present article therefore will be discuessing all the above mentioned aspects in understanding India-Morocco relations in the post-uprising phase which goes beyond the economic interests of both the countries.

Key Words : India Africa Forum Summit, Culture, Tourism, Training

INTRODUCTION

Historical overview of India-Morocco relations:

India-Morocco relation culturally starts from the fourteenth century, when the celebrated Moroccan traveller Ibn-Batuta came to India and wrote extensively about the socio-political and cultural history of the country in his travelogue. In modern times India- Morocco relations is marked by India's active support for Morocco's independence movement at the international level and its recognition on June 20, 1956. The diplomatic relations between the two countries established a year later in 1957. India and Morocco relations can be marked by breakthroughs and breakdowns. Although both the countries enjoy cordial and friendly relations but they also witnessed periods of strain and resentment particularly during the reign of King Hassan II.

Morocco is a Muslim majority country and during the time of King Hassan II his foreign policy was also guided by the concept of Islamic brotherhood (or close ties with Muslim countries). Therefore in the post-independent phase Morocco forged close ties with

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Pakistan that affected India-Morocco relations. However, in the post Arab-uprising era, Moroccan leadership put more emphasis on its African identity and used the same to enhance its ties with India.

In the pre-globalization period, trade relations between India and Morocco were quite limited. In fact, before the 1990s only three Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) were signed between the two countries (Gautam 2011). The first trade agreement between India and Morocco was signed in 1960. In the early phase, India's major import from Morocco was limited to rock phosphate and cork-wood while the export mainly constituted Indian green tea and tobacco. However in the early 1980 economic ties were enhanced and both the countries signed three new MoUs including one in the field of technical co-operation (ibid).

The political events of 1984 and 1985 affected the diplomatic engagement of India and Morocco. In 1984 Organisation of African Unity (OAU now African Union) recognized the independence of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and admitted the later as a member state in the Pan-African (AU) organization. In resentment Morocco left the OAU(in May 1984). As an ardent promoter of de-colonization India also recognized SADR in 1985. India's decision to recognize SADR resulted in the breaking of diplomatic ties with Morocco (Bobb 1985). However, despite the absence of diplomatic positivity the economic relations were continued. To induce the economic cooperation a joint working body 'India- Morocco Joint Business Committee' was established. The committee held its first meeting in 1985 in Rabat. The meeting proved successful in identifying new areas for trade exchange which were earlier limited to phosphates, green tea, and tobacco. Therefore since 1985 the committee has successfully conducted five meetings and worked towards the exploration of new areas of engagements and promotion of qualitative trade relations.

In 1988 the political and diplomatic relation between India and Morocco registered a relative stability. Particularly after Morocco and the Polisario front (SADR) agreed to a cease-fire and accepted the UN peace and settlement plan. This decision revived India-Morocco ties and their diplomatic relations have been restored since then (MEA Annual Report GOI 1988-89). The UN Security Council although tried to manage the Western Sahara conflict but could not resolve it till date. UN created a peacekeeping force and worked towards organising a referendum on self-determination of Sahrawi people. However due to various reasons the plebiscite could not happen and all negotiations to resolve the issues went in vain. For Morocco the issue of Western Sahara remains a guiding force for its foreign policy behaviour (Library of Congress 2006).

The effort of the mid-1980s for the enhancement of economic and trade relations between India and Morrocco has paid off in the 1990s in the following ways; First, the arrival of liberalization and globalization phase that shaped both the countries economic policies. Second, the restoration of India and Morocco's diplomatic relations that officially started from 20th October 1990 (Kumar 1990). Both the above defined factors buoyed the bilateral relations in the post 1990s phase and as a result nine MoUs and nine agreements were concluded between India and Morocco. The areas encompassing these agreements were trade and commerce, export promotion and joint business councils within the field of technology, energy, agriculture, mining, and shipping (Gautam 2011). Since the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1990s, the first high-level meeting between India and Morocco took place in 1993 when Indian vice president visited Morocco at the invitation of Moroccan prime minister.

The bilateral commercial exchanges were central to the high-level meetings of the 1990s. To provide quality enhancement of their bilateral interactions the joint economic body 'India-Morocco Joint Commission,' convened its second meeting in 1995 in New Delhi. A new area of cooperation in the field of solar energy was incorporated (Annual Report MEA 1995-96).

The economic relations between India and Morocco grew despite the absence of deeper political relations. Both the countries were guided by the overarching economic issues that compelled their leaders to set aside the political indifference and worked towards fostering the economic alliance.

However the political events of late 1990s and early 2000 infused new synergy in India-Morocco diplomatic relations: the enthronement of new King Mohammed VI in 1999 and India's decision to de-recognise SADR in 2000. India-Morocco relations reached to new heights when for the first time the then Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Morocco in 1999. During his visit, key agreements were signed including Bilateral Investment Protection Agreement, Tourism Co-operation Agreement, MoU between Press Trust of India (PTI) and Maghreb Arab Presse (MAP) for mutual professional

cooperation. A flagship programme called IMACID (phosphate plant) the first joint venture (a multimillion-dollar project) started in Morocco in 1999. The joint venture was between M/S Chambal Chemical and Fertilizers Ltd. (Birla group) and *Office Cherifien des Phosphates* (OCP) to produce phosphoric acid. This joint venture elevated the relationship between the two countries to new heights (Gautam 2011).

The ensuing positivity of Indian PM Vajpayee's visit consolidated with an immediate tour of his Moroccan counterpart Aberrahman El Youssoufi, (the prime minister of Morocco) in 2000. And surprisingly, the National Democratic Alliance government announced its decision to de-recognize SADR in 2000 at the time when the Moroccan prime minister was still in India. The Indian government's decision to derecognise SADR ruptured the long-standing Indian policy of supporting decolonization (The Hindu 28 June 2000). However, the announcement played a crucial role in enhancing India-Morocco political ties as the issue of Western Sahara is hinged to Moroccan foreign policy.

On the economic front another economic body 'Indo-Moroccan Business Council' (MIJBC) was created to foster economic ties in February 2000. To enhance cooperation Moroccan King Mohammed VI paid his first visit to India in 2001. The king's visit can be seen against the backdrop of India's sudden decision to de-recognize SADR in 2000 which was well taken by the monarchy and within a year of the Indian decision king Mohammed VI paid his first visit. Since 2001 the king paid three more visits to India once in 2003, then in 2005 and recently in 2015.

At the outset of king Mohammed VI's first visit of to India in 2001 four important documents were signed between India and Morocco including 'Delhi Declaration', Plant Quarantine and Plant Protection, Veterinary Sanitation, and cultural exchange programme (2001-2003) to facilitate mutual cooperation in the various field (Gautam 2011). Mohammed VI backed India's position on Kashmir and supported India's ambition for UNSC permanent candidature. The king also highlighted India's importance as an emerging global player and one of the active player in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). By signing the 'Delhi Declaration' both the countries agreed to work together in a multi-polar world based on equality and sovereignty of all states, territorial integrity, and non-interference in their internal matters and the use of peaceful means to resolve and disputes between the two sides (ibid).

In 2002 the II-session of 'Joint Commission Meeting' between India and Morocco held in Rabat, and it was co-chaired by both India-Morocco. In 2004 Moroccan Prime Minister Driss Jettou came with a large delegation to India. In 2005, 3rd India-Morocco Joint Commission meeting held in New Delhi. Thus the interaction between India- Morocco during that phase was guided by the economic ambition of both the nations. In 2006 an Indian Business delegation represented by ASSOCHAM visited Morocco to explore opportunities for joint ventures in the promising sectors of Morocco including automobiles, agriculture, power, and tourism were the probable industries to set up partnership arrangements between the two countries. The interaction between India and Morocco before the Arab uprising was mostly motivated by business and trade-related issues that gradually enhanced their diplomatic bilateral co-operations and facilitated the new phase of congeniality and warmth.

Post-Arab uprising enhancement of relations between India And Morocco

In Morocco, the national level protests and demonstrations started on 20th February 2011 as an impact of the ongoing Arab uprising across the West Asia and North African region. However, the movement did not take a violent turn or led to any drastic political and structural change in Morocco. Morocco survived the uprising by King Mohammed VI co-optation method and announcement of lucrative reforms within three weeks of the nationwide protests. Therefore for some observers, Morocco is considered an exception to the unprecedented event (Bartolucci 2011).

It is a well evident fact that one of the major reasons for the culmination of the 20th February movement was the adverse economic conditions and rising prices of necessary goods (Lalami 2011). The 2010 current account deficit of Morocco rose from 3.9 per cent to 8 per cent in 2011 that consequently resulted in the declining of Morocco's international reserve over the years by about $3 billion to $20.6 billion (Khan and Milbert 2013).

Therefore to boost export and recover from the balance of trade deficit soon after the end of the 20th February movement in 2011, Morocco prioritized and looked for diversification of its ties with its non-conventional partners such as China, Russia, and India. As a result a series of important bilateral meetings took

place between India and Morocco in the post uprising phase.

In the post Arab uprising a marked difference in the India-Morocco relations has been registered in terms of the approach of both the countries interactions. The current engagement between India-Morocco is placed in terms of Morocco's African connection. In the Annual report of 2012-2013 the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, classified Morocco within the countries of Africa. While in the previous year's Annual Reports (2011-2012) Morocco was included in the list of Gulf, West Asia, and North African category. The following change in India's interaction can be perceived in terms of Morocco's reassertion and reclaiming of its African roots which the later enshrined in its 2011 reformed constitution. The decision of Morocco to reassert its African root can be perceived in the context of Africa's emerging potential. Africa in contemporary phase is no more a lost continent. Its immense energy reserves, manpower, and natural deposits caught international attention in recent times. Therefore in the post Arab uprising era India-Morocco relation intensified on the sidelines of India-Africa relations.

Since the Arab uprising India-Morocco relations driven by the former's African ambition and the latter's African connection. The aforementioned statement can be perfectly understood with the unfolding of events in the post Arab uprising India-Morocco Joint Commission meeting. The fourth 'India- Morocco Joint Commission' meeting held in New Delhi on April 28-29 between Anand Sharma and Abdellatif Maazouz Indian Minister of Commerce and Industry and Moroccan Minister of External Trade respectively. The topics of discussion of the meeting were as follows. First, a provision was granted to Indian firms to have direct and preferential access to several markets of the African countries with which Morocco had free trade agreements (FTA), second the possibility for tripartite cooperation including India, Morocco, and Sub Saharan African countries was discussed. Third, a proposal for establishing strategic partnerships with the Indian industrial operators for executing projects particularly in African countries was considered (The Hindu 29 April 2011). Therefore the fourth India-Morocco Joint Commission Meeting can be considered a landmark event that shaped India-Morocco relations in the post-uprising phase. The JCM was followed by the meeting of India Morocco Joint Economic Council. Therefore the periodical meetings of both the economic bodies not only worked in the improvement of the bilateral relations of India and Morocco but also in moulding their interactions.

To consolidate India-Morocco ties, the Foreign Affairs Minister of Morocco Taib Fassi Fihri visited India in the same month in April 2011 and met Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna during their meeting along with the issue of mutual interests other issues of international importance were discussed.

In the post-uprising phase in June 2012 Indian minister of state for External Affairs, E. Ahamed visited Morocco for the second time. His first visit was in 2005. The major agenda of the visit was to grow bilateral cooperation and discuss the issues of international political importance. In 2014 Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid visited Morocco. The visit was historic in nature because Khurshid was the first Indian External Affairs Minister to visit the North African nation. During his official tour, an MoU in the field of Marine fisheries and Agreement on Environmental Cooperation was signed (MEA Feb 2016).

III-India Africa Summit: India-Morocco elevated relations:

India and Africa's relations have been institutionalized with the creation of India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) in 2008. So far three summits have been organized at the aegis of IAFS. The growing relations between India and Africa can be seen at the backdrop of emerging potential of Africa in terms of energy resources, manpower, and natural deposits which have attracted Western countries as well as Asian giants such as China, India, and Japan. Western interaction with Africa is categorized on the basis of the North-South (donor-recipient) aspect while South-South cooperation based on mutual interests and benefits. Therefore South-South cooperation provides significant leverage to African countries to chart guidelines and terms of foreign engagement in Africa which would be a win-win situation for both the nations of the south. The South-South cooperation refers to the exchange of resources, technology and knowledge between countries of the global south (UNESCO 2019).

India-Africa relation was guided by the ideological and historical linkages especially India's adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement, anti-colonial and its anti-apartheid stand during the twentieth century. However, in the twenty-first-century economic interest became the significant driving force for India-Africa relations. With

similar historical experiences and emerging global position India has more to offer to Africa in comparison to Western and other competing nations.

India took a leading role in the III India Africa Summit that held in 2015 in New Delhi and invited all 55 countries of Africa to join the summit. The summit played the main catalyst in the intensification of India-Morocco relations which already shaped in the post-uprising period. To maintain the positive fervour since 2015 almost 20 high-level visits and 35 agreements have been signed between the two nations (IANS 2019).

Some also hailed the III-IAFS meeting's significance by calling it the springboard for Morocco's re-entry into the African Union in 2017. In 2018 Morocco held a key position on the AU's Peace and Security Council for two years (Kasraoui 2018). Morocco was playing an empty chair policy for a long period of 33 years and abstained from the organisation after the organization recognized SADR and included them in the organization in 1984. The recent feather on Morocco's cap as the part of AU Security Council provided further zeal to India's interest in Morocco.

India decisiveness in inviting Morocco despite the objection of some of the African Union countries symbolises India's leading position. The invitation to attend the summit has also taken up with sheer enthusiasm by the Moroccan king who since his enthronement tried to forge a strong alliance with India. The current announcement of elevation of India-Morocco relations is the outcome of III IAFS. The culmination of two major documents the 'Delhi-Declaration 2015' and 'framework for strategic partnership' can be considered as the guiding principle for the elevated relations (MEA 2015). King Mohammed VI interacted with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of III IAFS and announced the prospect for a strategic partnership between India and Morocco. Since then a number of MoUs have been inked, and bilateral visits took place between the two countries. To encourage foreign investment Morocco charted out an attractive legal framework to encourage foreign investments by providing equal treatment to foreign investors as Moroccan nationals which includes guarantee and incentives to increase their investment in the North-African kingdom (Afro Asian 2019).

Another striking reason for the current impetus of India-Morocco relations can be marked by India's catchy foreign policy, make in India initiative launched by the current BJP government which attracted Morocco's interest. An interesting and co-incidental point of India-Morocco relation needs to be mentioned here is that during the first BJP (NDA) led government the Indian government retracted its previous policy pattern and surprisingly de-recognised SADR which removed the melancholic political and diplomatic relations between India and Morocco into a friendly mode. And once again in the current BJP tenure that ensued positivity started to take new shape and firmness in the form of a joint announcement of elevation of bilateral relations to the strategic level.

Major agreements and visits after III-IAFS between India and Morocco:

In 2016 Indian vice president Hamid Ansari reached Morocco and inked two major agreements in the field of cultural exchange and training and capacity building and institutional training for Foreign Service officers. Ansari highlighted the corresponding cultural similarity between Indian *Khanqah* and Moroccan *Zawiyas*, which belong to Sufi (Islamic) heritage (Ray 2017). Another aspect of cultural robustness was pointed out by the vice president was Indian films which are quite popular in Morocco and often screened during Moroccan International film festivals. Bollywood actors have huge fan followings in Morocco. The country facilitated Indian veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan with the award of 'Golden Star' for his lifetime contribution to the Indian film industry. The scenic beauty of Morocco is a major attraction of Indian film producers for outdoor shooting. Recently Salman Khan starrer 'Tiger Zinda Hai' was picturized in Morocco.

The agreement of Cultural Exchange Programme CEP (2016-2019) which was signed during the vice president Hamid Ansari's visit in 2016 aimed to boost cooperation in the field of music, art, cultural heritage and activities through the exchange of expertise and information in the same field. CEP is followed by another agreement in 2017 between Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCRs) and Mohammed V University, which catalysed the establishment of ICCR Chair for Hindi Language and Indian Studies in Morocco.

During Indian Vice President's 2016 state visit to Morocco, another agreement which got signed was in the field of research training and capacity building. An agreement between the Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs, (MEA India), and Moroccan

Academy for Diplomatic Studies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (Kingdom of Morocco) has been signed. By concluding the agreements both the countries agreed to exchange information regarding training programmes for diplomats, experts and researchers. The agreement is supposed to enhance communication and exchange of experts visits, publications, and useful information. To maintain the closeness of alliance in the area of research, training and cooperation in institutional relations an agreement between Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA, India), and the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (IRES, Morocco) was concluded in 2017 (MEA Dec 2018).

Acknowledging the multilateral importance of Morocco and to tap its economic potential as a hub of growing economic activities in Africa a joint trade body to boost commercial bilateral engagements 'India-Morocco Chamber of Commerce and Industry' (IMCCI) has been established in 2016 during the Vice president's visit (The Economic Times 2016). Furthermore, a large Indian business delegation attended the Morocco-India Business Forum organized in Casablanca in April 2017. In the field of phosphate production, another joint venture was announced in 2016 between OCP and Kribhco to develop a large scale Greenfield NPK fertilizer project in India (Andhra Pradesh).

During 5th India-Morocco Joint Commission Meeting held in May 2017 in Rabat, an MoU between Prasar Bharti (India) and *Societe Nationale de Radiodiffusion et de Television* (SNRT, Morocco) was signed to enhance cooperation between India and Morocco in the field of culture.

In late 2017 during the visit of Abdelkader Amara, Moroccan Minister of Transport, Logistics and Water resources, seven agreements each in the field of railways, health and telemedicine, water resources, maritime sectors and road and port infrastructures have been signed between the two countries. To strengthen cooperation in the field of health, Indian Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of the Kingdom of Morocco signed MoU on 14 December 2017. Another agreement was signed in the field of water resources. Apart from the above mentioned agreements, another MoU between Indian Railways (IR), and Moroccan National Railways Office (ONCF) was concluded in the same period. Collaboration in the area of telemedicine intensified with the inking of MoU between Marakkech Mohammed VI University Hospital (Morocco) and Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER) (MEA Annual Report 2017-18). India and Morocco agreed to pursue cooperation on maritime security issue through training and capacity building an agreement was signed between Indian Maritime University (IMU) and the Higher Institute of Maritime Studies (ISEM, Morocco) and the National Ports Agency (Port Training Institute, Morocco) (ibid).

Cooperation Framework Agreement on road and transportation sector is also a part of the enhancement of ties. In this relation, MoU between Indian Academy of Highway Engineers (IAHE), Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (India) and Institute of Training in Engines and Maintenance (IFEER) under the Ministry of Equipment, Transport, Logistics and Water (Morocco) had been signed in 2017.

The experience of AADHAAR attracted Morocco's attention and a delegation led by Noureddine Boutayeb (Minister delegate to Moroccan Ministry of Interior) visited India to study it experience. Apart from AADHAR, other areas such as crime, criminal tracking network system (CCTNS), DBT, gas subsidy, digitized banking were also been observed (Chaudhury 2017). During his visit to India in April 2018 Aziz Rabah minister of Energy Mines and Sustainable Development of Morocco signed an agreement in the field of mines and geology.

The Year of 2018 is marked by intense engagement and signing of agreements in new fields. Tourism holds central place in Moroccan economy therefore to enhance tourism between the two states MoU between India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), and SMIT of Morocco and Air Services Agreement has been signed during the visit of Mohammed Sajid the minister of tourism, air transport, handicraft, and social economy of Morocco in September 2018. Furthermore, during the visit, a regional office of Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) was inaugurated in New Delhi. Morocco is developing its tourism industry in accordance with its vision 2020 which has been charted out to make Morocco one of the top 20 global tourist destinations in the world. The economic shock of 2008-2015 marked by Western financial crisis subsequently decreased the number of European tourists to Morocco. Therefore Morocco is trying to diversify and forging new alliances in the field of tourism. In the absence of direct flight connections from India to Morocco, the number of Indian tourists is relatively low. But with the recent momentum of alliance

possibilities to create direct flight services from India to Morocco is under discussion. Besides this since early 2018, the Moroccan Embassy in India (New Delhi) introduced an outsourcing visa services in collaborations with Cox and Kings Global Services. Through these efforts, the number of Indians to visit Morocco increased by six per cent from 2016 to 2017. However, the increase did not reach the expected mark (40,000 Indian tourists by the end of 2019) which Morocco set for its 2020 vision (Afro Asian 2019;17).

In September 2018 Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj met his counterpart Nasser Bourita on the sidelines of 73rd UN General Assembly meeting in New York. A high-level meeting in the field of defence and security also took place in September 2018. Abdel Latef Loudyi the Minister Delegate of the National Defense of the kingdom during his visit to India signed two agreements in the field of cybersecurity and another in the area of peaceful use of outer space. The cooperation in the field of space activities encompasses practical applications of space technologies, training and transfer of scientific know how (MEA Annual Report 2017-18).

To promote financial cooperation and increase bilateral investments between the two countries a senior delegation from the ministry of finances of Morocco came to India in late 2018. On 25 September 2018 to enhance closeness in the field of micro, small and medium enterprises between India and Morocco an MoU between National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) and Moroccan National agency for the promotion of Small and Medium Sized Enterprise was signed (Embassy of India 2019).

In November 2018 during the visit of Mohammed Auajjar, Morocco's minister of justice to New Delhi another field of common engagement got sealed with the signing of MoU on the issue of mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, legal and judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters, and extradition.

To find out the areas of mutual interest and forging of strategic partnership a conference was organized in Rabat on November 28, 2018, through the joint partnership of IRES Morocco and ICWA. The theme of the conference was 'Relations between Morocco and India: What are the levers for the establishment of a strategic partnership?' A six-member Indian delegation attended the symposium and discussed the probable areas of mutual interests and enhancement of the strategic partnership between the two countries (IRES 2019). Since the signing of ICWA and IRES agreement in 2017, this was the first conference which got organised.

With the starting of 2019 development of India Morocco relations reached new heights. Two academic conventions between the National School of Architecture (Marrakesh, Morocco) and Indian Institute of Technology IIT Gujarat were signed on 19th January 2019. On 22 January 2019 India Morocco inked a key pact to facilitate 'Mutual Recognition of Academic Qualifications'. Besides that, more than fifty delegates from Morocco cutting across different sectors came to India and participated in "9th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2019" as a partner country (Gujarat gov.in 2019). To strengthen Indo-African unity India also celebrated Africa day on 19th January 2019 in the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit.

To consolidate and bolster the strategic partnership in the field of mutual interest the recent trip of Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj holds paramount position. During her visit, the External Affairs Minister highlighted the significance of India's multilateral relations with Morocco and on 17th February 2019 she signed an agreement in the field of counter-terrorism. The agreement will lead the way for a joint working group to combat terrorism, the areas of cooperation on the issue of counter-terrorism including cross-border terrorism, terrorist financing, and recruitment of terrorists. Appreciating and acknowledging the counter-terrorism acts of Morocco Swaraj called Morocco 'a leader of the counter-terrorism' (UNI 2019). Both the countries also signed three other MOUs one in the field of Housing and Human Settlement to cooperate in the field of low cost and affordable housing, urban planning and smart cities. Another MoU inked on cooperation related to youths to encourage people to people connection through participation in events, exchange programmes and exchange of knowledge and information. And the last MoU was signed to facilitate the procedure for issue of Business Visa to strengthen economic relations (Devdiscourse 2019). Recently in the Sri Lankan Church attack in April 2019 Morocco shared key intelligence with Sri Lanka and India (IANS 24 April 2019). Affirming to its anti-terrorism stand.

Trade and investments between India- Morocco since Arab uprising:

The major items of Indian exports to Morocco includes various products such as intermediate goods,

Table 1 : India-MoroccoTrade (2010-2018) (in million US $)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018* (Jan-Oct)
India's Export	573.5	587.2	517.7	615.0	500.5	398.2	634.0	637	601.1
India's Import	1,059.6	1,455.6	1,212	796.3	855.8	873.2	758.5	683.6	896.2
Total	1632.5	2042.8	1729.7	1411.3	1356.3	1271.4	1392.5	1320.6	1497.3

(*) provisional Data

(Source: Statistics Bulletin of Office des changes, Govt. of Morocco)

*As per the provisional trade figures for the period of January (MEA 2019 report pg 8-9).

chemicals, raw materials, minerals, metals, vegetable, textile and clothing, consumer goods, capital goods, plastic or rubber, animal wood, food products, miscellaneous, transportations, stone and glass, hides and skin, fuels, footwear. Indian companies are showing sheer interest in the Moroccan market for investment and trade and *vice versa*. Recently in 2019 Morocco partnered in the execution of Global Gujarat Summit attests to the growing synergy between the two countries.

Bilateral trade between India Morocco majorly revolved around phosphates and its derivatives. However, in recent times bilateral trade has been diversified between the two countries. Still, phosphate and its derivates hold a prime position in India's import's list. Apart from phosphate, other products such as aluminum waste and scrap, copper waste and scrap, sulphur, lead, wool, zinc, automobile parts, cobalt, paper or paper board, manganese, ceramic products are becoming part of India's import from Morocco (Infodrive India 2019) India's increasing population and the pressing issue of food security make the country a major importer of the phosphates and its derivatives. Latest provisional data from Moroccan government highlights the trade pattern between India and Morocco since 2010

From the Table 1, it is observed that since 2010 the total trade between India and Morocco registers a fluctuating trend which reached its low point in 2015 when the total trade was US$ 1271.4 million which was quite low compared to 2011 when the total trade reached at an all-time high at US$ 2042.8 million. In 2014 Indian export to Morocco decreased by 21.6 per cent compared to the previous year while 10.2 per cent increase has been marked in Morocco's export in 2014.

In October 2018 (according to provisional data), trade between the two countries registered at US$ 1497.3 million, and India's exports to Morocco was at US$ 601.1 million while imports was valued at US$ 896.2 million. The increasing trend has been registered from January to September 2017. India's exports to Morocco have been increased by 19.5% similarly India's imports from Morocco have also increased by 72.6 per cent. This surge of 72.6 per cent in India's imports from Morocco in 2018 mainly attributed to a steep rise in the exports of phosphoric acid, natural & chemical fertilizers and phosphates from Morocco to India. Moroccan balance of payment mostly registers surplus trend with Indian trade.

Conclusion:

It is well evident that the changing geopolitical scenario and the events of the past few years particularly the occurrence of Arab uprising shaped the India-Morocco relations in recent times. The emerging role of India as a global power attracted Morocco's interest in India, while India's African ambition is one of the important factors for India's recent closeness to Morocco. This can be marked by the series of high-level bilateral visits and signing of a number of agreements and MoUs between the two countries since the Arab uprising.

Though one could argue that the signing of agreements between the two states due to economic reasons is not new and it has its base since the globalization and liberalization phase of the 1990s, however, the current impetus of engagement can be marked by new areas of cooperation which goes beyond the economic interests of both the parties. Morocco is emerging as a promoter of peace and security within the region. And to harness the economic benefits a peaceful Africa becomes essential for India's interest. Therefore forging ties in the areas of peace and security is another signifier of India-Morocco relations in the current times. For instance, the signing of counter-terrorism agreement in February 2019 is an important step towards forging strategic relations between India and Morocco.

Morocco's geostrategic location between Africa, Europe, and West Asia and Free Trade Agreement with Sub Saharan African countries is another incentive for India's trade and investment interests. The re-entry of Morocco in the African Union in 2017 is another booster for India's ambition for South-South cooperation in Africa.

The enhancement of ties with Morocco can also help India to limit China's expansion and assertiveness in Africa.

Their mutual relationship status in the absence of a conflicting agenda presents a win-win exemplar in the context of international relations. While sharing mutual interest on the issue of global terrorism and territorial integrity the recent swing would be contributory in promoting a peaceful and stabilized world. With all being said the elevation of India-Morocco relationship was a much-needed step, but how far this relationship will prove beneficial for both the countries strategic agendas is remained to be tested.

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