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The importance of Saudi Arabia to India



Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Why in news?

- The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) recently visited New Delhi for the G20 Leaders' Summit. There he, along with PM Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden, announced the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, a massive infrastructure project that would connect India to Europe via West Asia, and could rival China's Belt and Road Initiative.
- MBS stayed back after the Summit for a State Visit, and co-chaired with Modi the first meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council.
- The two sides signed eight agreements, including on upgrading their hydrocarbon energy partnership to a comprehensive energy partnership for renewable, petroleum and strategic reserves, and to create a joint task force for \$100 billion in Saudi investment.
- They also discussed the possibility of trading in local currencies, and expediting negotiations for a free trade agreement between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council of which Saudi Arabia is a member.
- PM Modi described Saudi Arabia as one of India's most important strategic partners.

Strengthening old ties

- The two countries established diplomatic relations in 1947. They have always enjoyed cordial and friendly relations that reflect their socio-cultural and economic ties going back centuries.
- The visit of King Abdullah to India in 2006 was a watershed moment in the relationship. This visit resulted in the signing of the Delhi Declaration, which was followed in 2010 by the Riyadh Declaration that elevated bilateral ties to a strategic partnership.
- During PM Modi's 2016 visit to Riyadh, King Salman conferred on him, the kingdom's highest civilian honour, the King Abdulaziz Sash.
- In 2019, it was announced that Saudi Arabia would invest about \$100 billion in India. In the same year, the Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) Agreement was signed, which established a high-level council to steer the Indo-Saudi relationship.



Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) with PM Modi

Four pillars of India-Saudi Arabia relationship:

Economic Ties

- India is Saudi Arabia's second-largest trade partner; Saudi Arabia is India's fourth-largest trade partner. Bilateral trade in FY2022-23 was valued at \$52.76 billion.
- Trade with Saudi Arabia accounted for 4.53% of India's total trade in FY23.
- Saudi direct investments in India amounted to \$3.15 billion (as of March 2022).
- Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) has invested in several Indian startups such as Delhivery, FirstCry, Grofers, Ola, OYO, Paytm, and PolicyBazaar through SoftBank Vision Fund.

Energy cooperation

- Saudi Arabia is a key partner for ensuring India's energy security, and was its third largest crude and petroleum products source for FY23.
- India imported 39.5 million metric tonnes (MMT) of crude from the country in FY23, amounting to 16.7% of India's total crude imports.
- India's LPG imports from Saudi Arabia stood at 7.85 MMT, and 11.2% of its total petroleum product imports, in FY 23.

Defence partnership

- The defence partnership between India and Saudi Arabia has witnessed tremendous growth in recent years.
- There is extensive naval cooperation between the two countries. Two editions of the bilateral naval exercise, Al Mohed al Hindi, have been concluded so far. Both sides also cooperate closely in the domain of defence industries and capacity-building.

Indians in Saudi

- The Indian community in Saudi Arabia is more than 2.4 million strong. It is widely respected for its contribution to the development of Saudi Arabia.
- Notably, Saudi Arabia actively supported the evacuation of Indian nationals stranded in Sudan through Jeddah under Operation Kaveri.

The importance of MBS

- After being named Prime Minister, a post traditionally held by the King, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has consolidated his power. At age 38, he is Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, and has been first in line to succeed his ailing father as King since 2017.
- Through his Vision 2030, MBS has positioned himself as Saudi Arabia's reformer-in-chief. He has ensured significant changes in the country's ultra-conservative society, where women have got the right to drive, and where cinemas have been opened, foreign tourists are welcomed, and pop stars and high-profile sports matches have been hosted.
- MBS has engaged with China, he is moving towards rapprochement with Iran and Israel, and is also now consolidating the Saudi partnership with the US, India, and Europe.

National Judicial Data Grid to aid courts in disposing pending cases

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Why in news?

- The Supreme Court recently onboarded its case data on the National Judicial Data Grid. The NJDG portal is a national repository of data relating to cases instituted, pending and disposed of by the courts across the country.



What is the National Judicial Data Grid?

- NJDG (<https://njdg.ecourts.gov.in/njdgnew/index.php>) is a database of orders, judgments and case details of 18,735 District and subordinate Courts and High Courts created as an online platform under the eCourts Project.
- Its key feature is that the data is updated in real-time and has granular data up to the Taluka level.

Who runs the NJDG?

- The NJDG was built as part of Phase II of the e-Courts project, which is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- With over 18,735 courts computerised across the country, the data is integrated with the NJDG.
- Currently, litigants can access case status information of 23.81 crore cases and more than 23.02 crore orders/judgments.

How does the data help?

- NJDG works as a monitoring tool to identify, manage & reduce pendency of cases. Take, for instance, the Supreme Court data. For 2023, the total pendency of registered cases in SC is 64,854. But the Cases instituted last month were 5,412 while cases disposed of in the last month were 5,033.
- This shows that the pendency in SC is largely due to legacy cases since the Court is currently disposing of approximately the same number of cases filed on an annual basis.
- It also helps identify specific bottlenecks in judicial processes. For example, if the number of land disputes in a particular state shoots up, it helps policymakers look into whether the law needs to be strengthened. Referring to the data of year-wise pendency of cases, the CJI said the apex court has less than a hundred cases pending before 2000 and it gives data tools to the Chief Justice to re-organise work and dispose of the oldest cases.
- It also helps generate inputs related to particular areas of law. For example, to track cases related to land disputes, Land Records data of 26 States have been linked with NJDG.

India gets the authority to issue OIML certificates

Relevance: Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Why in news?

- India has become an OIML certificate-issuing authority.
- The Legal Metrology Division, Department of Consumer Affairs, is now authorised to issue OIML certificates.



What is the OIML?

- The OIML stands for International Organisation of Legal Metrology. Established in 1955 and headquartered in Paris, the OIML is an international standard-setting body.
- It develops model regulations, standards and related documents for use by legal metrology authorities and industry.
- It plays a crucial role in harmonising national laws and regulations on performance of measuring instruments like clinical thermometers, alcohol breath analysers, radar speed measuring instruments, ship tanks found at ports, and petrol dispensing units.
- India became a member of the OIML in 1956. In the same year, India signed the metric convention.

What is the OIML certificate?

- The OIML-CS is a system for issuing, registering and using OIML certificates, and their associated OIML type evaluation/test reports, for instruments like digital balance, clinical thermometers, etc.
- With the addition of India, the number of countries authorised to issue OIML certificates has increased to 13.
- OIML certificate is a single certificate accepted worldwide. For e.g, suppose there is an equipment-manufacturer making digital balances in Noida, and he wants to export it.
- Earlier, he would be required to go to one of the 12 other countries for certification. Now, the certificates can be issued in India and the equipment will be exportable, acceptable to the entire world.

Benefits for India

- This move is expected to help the Indian economy in several ways, including increase in exports, earning of foreign exchange, and generation of employment.
- Since only few countries are authorised, neighboring countries and manufacturers can come to India to get their certification done.

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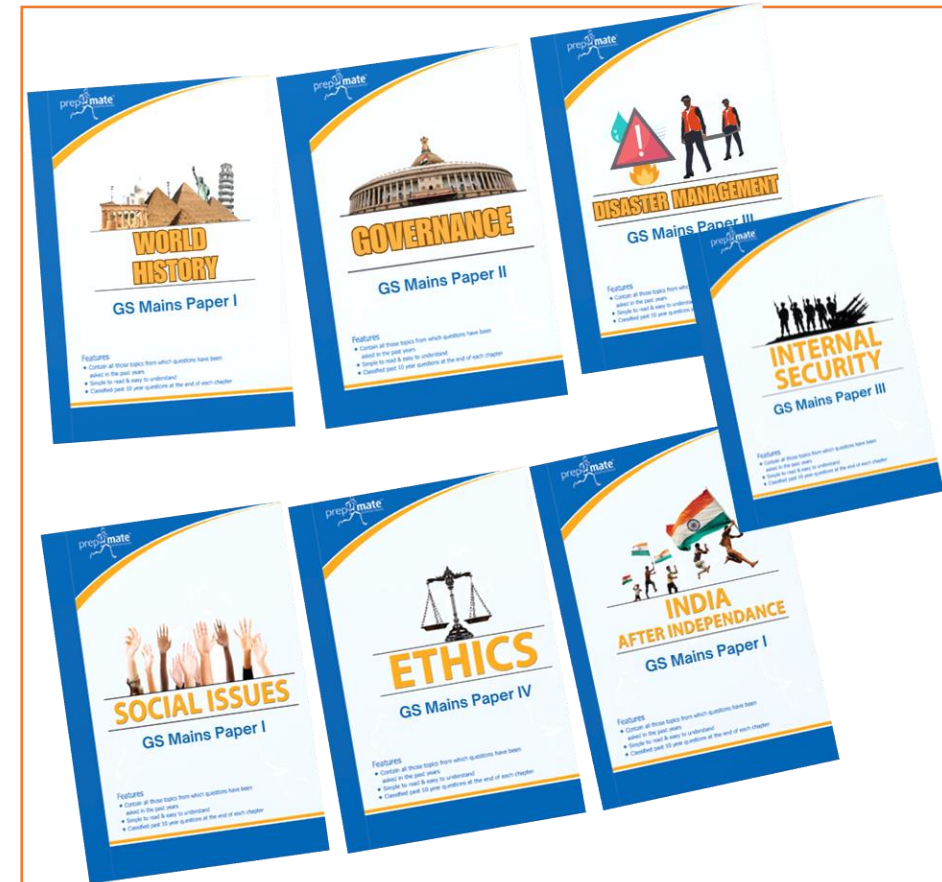
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