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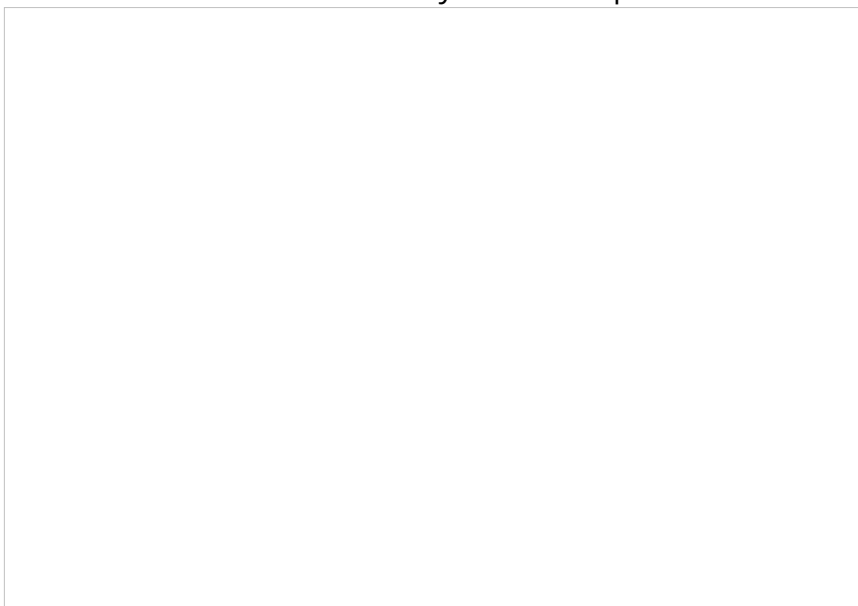
News Analysis (21 Feb, 2019)

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Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Visit to India

Recently, **Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman** visited India.

This was the **first state visit** by the crown prince in India.



Outcome of Visit

- A number of memorandum of understandings(MoUs) were signed during the visit on investing in the **National Investment and Infrastructure Fund of India**, cooperation programme between Invest India and Saudi Arabia General Investment Authority (SAGIA).
- Other MoUs include tourism, housing, exchange of Audio-Visual Programmes.
- Saudi Arabia also agreed to join the **International Solar Alliance (ISA)**.
- Saudi Arabia has strongly condemned the terrorist attack on Indian security forces in Pulwama on 14 February.
- The two sides called for early adoption of the UN **Comprehensive Convention on**

International Terrorism (CCIT).

National Investment and Infrastructure Fund of India

- The NIIF is a sovereign fund owned by the government of India (49% ownership) along with global and domestic institutional players. The size of fund is Rs. 40,000 crore.
- The fund has an investment "mandate to invest in infrastructure assets and related businesses" that are projected to see "long term growth trajectory".

India-Saudi Arabia Relations

- **Strategic Partnership**

- Saudi Arabia is a **strategic partner of India** since the signing of the **Riyadh Declaration in 2010**.
- India is also one of the eight strategic partners with whom Saudi Arabia intends to deepen partnership in areas of political, security, trade and investment and culture.

- **Economic Relations**

Saudi Arabia is India's 4th largest trading partner bilateral trade stood at around US\$ 28 billion during 2017-18.

- **Energy Security**

- India imports more than 17% of crude oil and 32% of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) requirements from Saudi Arabia.
- Recently, Saudi ARAMCO in partnership with UAE has agreed to invest US\$ 44 billion in building Ratnagiri Refinery and Petro-Chemical project Ltd.
- Saudi Arabia also has a major role in India's **Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs)**.

Strategic Petroleum Reserves

- Strategic petroleum reserves are **huge stockpiles of crude oil** to deal with any crude oil-related crisis like the risk of supply disruption from natural disasters, war or other calamities.
- India's strategic crude oil storages are currently located at Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Mangaluru(Karnataka), and Padur (Karnataka).
- Recently, the government had announced setting up of two additional facilities at Chandikhol (Odisha) and Padur (Karnataka).

Diaspora Relations

There are about **2.7 million Indians living in Saudi Arabia**. They send **remittance of over US\$ 11 billion** annually. Saudi Arabia also facilitates Hajj pilgrimage to over 1,75,000 Indians every year, which is the largest number of pilgrims from any country.

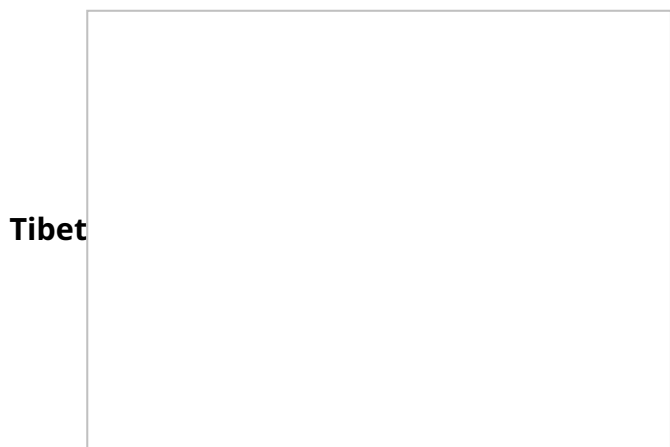
Challenges to the India-Saudi relationship

- **The Saudi-Pakistan and India-Iran relationship:** Saudi Arabia's relation with Pakistan and India's relation with Iran are two important factors affecting the India-Saudi Arabia relationship.
 - **India expects Saudi Arabia to restrain Pakistan** from allowing its territory being used by terrorists targeting India.
 - **Diaspora-related issues:** This includes the treatment of Indian workers in Saudi Arabia and **Saudi Arabia's Nitaqat Programme**, which aims at increasing the employment of Saudi nationals in the private sector, might limit employment opportunities for Indian expatriates.
 - **Radicalization in India:** Many Saudi Arabia based agency have been blamed for **funding spread of fundamentalist Wahhabi and Salafist ideology in India.**
 - Saudi Arabia is considered to be the **primary supporter of a supposedly more rigid interpretation of Islam.** This has implications for how Islam functions in India.
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60 Years of 1959 Tibetan Uprising

Recently China has banned foreign tourists from visiting Tibet until April, 2019.

The restriction is imposed due to security reasons ahead of the **60th anniversary of 1959's uprising against China** on March 10.



- Tibet is a region on the **Tibetan Plateau in Asia**, spanning about 2.4 million km² – nearly **a quarter of China's territory**.
- It is the traditional homeland of the Tibetan people as well as some other ethnic groups.
- Tibet is the **highest region on Earth**, with an **average elevation of 4,900 metres**. The highest elevation in Tibet is **Mount Everest**, Earth's highest mountain, rising 8,848 m above sea level.

Tibet Uprising of 1959

- From 1912 until the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, no Chinese government exercised control over what is today China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR).
- Many Tibetans insist they were essentially independent for most of that time and have protested what they regard as China's rule imposed after the People's Liberation Army occupied TAR in 1950.
- The Dalai Lama's government alone ruled the land until 1951. Tibet was not "Chinese" until **Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army (PLA)** marched in and made it so.
- This has often been described by the Tibetan people and third party commentators as "**a cultural genocide**".
- The unsuccessful Tibetan Uprising of 1959, in which Tibetans rebelled in an attempt to overthrow the Chinese government, led to the fleeing of the 14th Dalai Lama to India.

Aftermath of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising

- Since the 1959 Uprising, the central government of China has been steadily tightening its grip on the Tibet.
- In Tibet today, there is no freedom of speech, religion, or press and arbitrary detainments continue.
- Forced abortion, sterilisation of Tibetan women, and the transfer of low-income Chinese citizens threaten the survival of Tibetan culture.
- Although China has invested in infrastructure improvements for the region, particularly in Lhasa itself, it has also encouraged thousands of ethnic Han Chinese to move to Tibet resulting into demographic shift.
- The **14th Dalai Lama, continues to head the Tibetan government-in-exile** from McLeod Ganj, a suburb of **Dharamsala**, India which coordinates political activities for Tibetans in India.
- Dalai Lama advocates increased autonomy for Tibet, rather than full independence, but the Chinese government generally refuses to negotiate with him.
- Periodic unrest still sweeps through Tibet, especially around important dates such as March 10 to 19 - the anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan Uprising.

Sino-Indian Conflict Over Dalai Lama

- Apart from the border disputes, another major irritant for China has been over the **Dalai Lama**, who enjoys a **spiritual status in India**.
- **China considers Dalai Lama a separatist**, who has great influence over Tibetans. It must be mentioned that Dalai Lama gave up his support for Tibetan independence in 1974, and only wants China to stop repression against the community.
- Former Prime Minister **Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to provide all assistance to the**

Tibetan refugees to settle in India until their eventual return.

- The Government of India has built special schools for Tibetans that provide free education, health care, and scholarships. There are a few medical and civil engineering seats reserved for Tibetans.
- While India's role in the rehabilitation of Tibetan refugees has been criticised by China, it has drawn **praise from international bodies** and human rights groups.

Operation Digital Board

The **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** has launched **Operation Digital Board (ODB)** to leverage technology in order to boost **quality education in the country**.

ODB aims to have digital and interactive boards in every classroom, which is on the **lines of Operation Blackboard** which was **started in 1987** to supply the **bare minimum crucial facilities to all primary schools in the country**.

Features

- The digital board will be introduced all over the country in **government and government aided schools** from **class 9th onwards** as well as in **higher education institutions**, from the coming session of 2019 itself.
- **University Grants Commission (UGC)** will be the implementing agency for ODB in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). It will be implemented as a Central scheme, as a loan from **Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA)**.
- At school level, Digital / SMART board will be provided in all Government and Government – aided schools by the Central Government in collaboration with the State and UTs.
- It aims at **converting a classroom into a digital classroom**.
- Ensure **availability of e-resources** at any time and at any place to students.
- Help in provisioning of **personalised adaptive learning** as well as **Intelligent Tutoring** by exploiting emerging technologies like **Machine Learning, Artificial Intelligence & Data Analytics**.

Higher Education Financing Agency

- Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) was **incorporated in 2017** as a joint venture of **MHRD and Canara Bank** with an agreed equity participation in the ratio of **91% and 9% respectively**.
- Its objective is to finance the **creation of capital assets in premier educational institutions in India**.
- It is registered **under Section 8 [Not-for-profit] under the Companies Act 2013** as a Union Govt company and as **Non-deposit taking NBFC-ND with RBI**.

- Recently, HEFA's scope has been **expanded to cover school education, educational institutes under Ministry of Health, etc.**

Benefits

- It will help in **improving the quality of learning** by providing adequate content of high quality which can be taken to every classroom.
 - Such technology enabled learning can also **inspire teachers across the country** to raise their own standards of teaching.
 - Apart from this, **other initiatives** like e-Pathshala, DIKSHA, National Repository of Open Educational Resources (NROER), National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), e-PG Pathshala, SWAYAM and SWAYAM-Prabha DTH Channels etc. have also provided adequate content of high quality which can be taken to every classroom, and thereby facilitating blended learning and flip class learning.
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Important Facts for Prelims (21st February 2019)

New-Universe Map

- The scientists have published a **new map of the night sky** and discovered hundreds of thousands of galaxies which were previously unknown.
- The discovery was made using the **Low-frequency Array (LOFAR) telescope.**
- LOFAR can detect light sources which optical instruments **cannot see using radio astronomy.**
- The discovery will shed new light on some of the Universe's secrets, including the physics of black holes and how clusters of galaxies evolve.
- **Radio Astronomy:** Radio astronomy allows scientists to detect radiation **produced when massive celestial objects interact.**
- **LOFAR Telescope:** The LOFAR telescope is made up of a **network of radio antenna** across **seven countries in Europe**, forming the equivalent of a 1,300-km diameter satellite dish.

LOFAR is developed by a **consortium of knowledge institutes**, universities and industrial parties, led by **ASTRON-Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy.**

VIVID 2019

VIVID-**Vision Insight and Voices as India goes Digital**- the District Informatics Officer (DIO) meet, was organised by **National Informatics Centre (NIC).**

National Informatics Centre

- NIC provides nationwide ICT infrastructure to support e-Governance services and various initiatives of Digital India.
- It is part of the **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's Department of Electronics & Information Technology.**
- The meet is held as an initiative to interact with the DIO's and to share their experiences as well as contribution, as the digital change-makers at the grassroot level in the States.
- **VIVID started in 2017, as an annual event**, with the objective to empower NIC officials in the field of technology.

Attukal Pongala

- The Attukal Pongala held in **Attukal Temple, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala** and is the largest **congregation of women** for a **festival in the world.**
- Pongala, which means 'to boil over', is the ritual in which women prepare sweet payasam (a pudding made from rice, jaggery, coconut and plantains cooked together) and offer it to the Goddess or 'Bhagavathy'.
- The ritual can **only be performed by women** and the streets of the city are known to be jam-packed with faithful devotees during the time of the festival.
- The Goddess-fondly referred to as 'Attukalamma' is said to be appeased by this ritual.
- The Attukal Pongala entered the **Guinness Book of Records as the largest gathering of women in 2009.**

Western Disturbance

- According to India Meteorological Department (IMD), this winter season's most powerful Western Disturbance (WD) is all set to hit north India.
- Already, six to seven WDs have affected north India in February 2019, while a few more western disturbances are expected by March 1.
- WD or the areas of **"disturbed air pressure"** traveling to India from the **west** are a **regular feature through the winter season.**
- These are basically **"extra-tropical storms" or low pressure systems** originating **outside the tropical regions.**
- Unlike a tropical cyclone which is formed in the lower atmosphere, a temperate cyclone (like WDs) is **usually formed in the upper atmosphere.** Therefore, they can **travel greater distances and can hence affect large areas of land** (sometimes can travel eastwards along the sub-Himalayan belt and reach up to Arunachal Pradesh).
- The factors that determine the strength of WDs are the **location and intensity of the jet stream** and the **amount of moisture being carried by the low-pressure system.**
- The **westerly jet streams (massive fast winds traversing the earth from west to**

east) carry them.

- The rain and snow they bring in their wake to north India and neighbouring regions is formed from the **moisture they carry from the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea.**
 - They help **sustain Himalayan glaciers** and the local ecology and **provide nourishment to winter crops (Rabi Crops- wheat, barley, mustard, gram, lentil, etc.).**
 - They are also **associated with cloudy skies** and an **increase in night-time temperatures** in parts of north India. They can also cause strong winds that help **disperse suspended pollutants** in the smog-filled cities of the region, including New Delhi.
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