Syllabus subtopic: Bilateral, Regional and Global Groupings and Agreements involving India and/or affecting India’s interests.

Prelims and Mains focus: about the West Asia peace plan and issues around it; about OIC and its significance for India

News: The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has said it rejects US President Donald Trump’s recently unveiled Middle East plan.

- The 57-member body, which held a summit to discuss the plan in Saudi Arabia’s Jeddah, said in a statement that it "calls on all member states not to engage with this plan or to cooperate with the US administration in implementing it in any form".

Background

US President Donald Trump had described his long-delayed plan for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a "win-win solution" for both sides.

About OIC

- It is an international organization founded in 1969, consisting of 57 member states.

- It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations.

- The organisation states that it is “the collective voice of the Muslim world” and works to “safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony“.

- The OIC has permanent delegations to the United Nations and the European Union.

- Permanent Secretariat is in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
Key bodies:

1. the Islamic Summit,
2. the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM),
3. the General Secretariat, in addition to the Al-Quds Committee and three permanent committees concerned with science and technology, economy and trade, and information and culture.
4. There are also specialized organs under the banner of the OIC including the Islamic Development Bank and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as subsidiary and affiliate organs that play a vital role in boosting cooperation in various fields among the OIC member states.

India and OIC

India’s former External Affairs Minister (EAM) Sushma Swaraj addressed the inaugural session of the 46th Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers on March 1, 2019, in Abu Dhabi as a “guest of honor”. The moment was phenomenal in itself: for the first time in 50 years, since OIC’s inception, India attended it.

India was invited to attend the first summit of the OIC 50 years ago in 1969 in Morocco. But the Indian delegation had to return midway due to a withdrawal of the invitation after Pakistan’s objection. It was a setback for Indian diplomacy, as it could not further become a part of the second largest inter-governmental organization in the world (after the United Nations). Pakistan’s adamant stance toward India’s non-entry in the grouping has ensured even today that India is neither a member nor an observer of the OIC, despite having one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Countries like Thailand and Russia are observer members, despite having a significant minority Muslim population.

In addition to this, the OIC’s stand on the Kashmir issue questions the state of Jammu and Kashmir as a legitimate part of India. The organization has been generally supportive of Pakistan’s concerns over Jammu and Kashmir. With regards to this, the OIC has been issuing statements criticizing alleged atrocities and human rights violations in the state.

But winds of change have been blowing for India. India is the third largest economy in the world, one of the biggest importers of hydrocarbons like gas and oil, and one of the largest exporters of labor, with more than 8 million Indians.
living in West Asia, especially in the Gulf region. West Asia and India’s growing economic and energy interdependence makes it difficult for the former to ignore the latter.

India’s presence at the 46th OIC meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers is historic, but it still remains a stepping stone toward larger engagement with the OIC and the Muslim world. Article 4 (1) of the OIC Charter states the need for consensus among the OIC Council of Ministers for deciding on granting observer status to a state. Consensus-building for India’s entry in the grouping without Pakistan’s support is inconceivable. Thus, it remains in India’s interest to engage positively with Pakistan on this issue and collectively work for the ideals to which the OIC is committed.

With mushrooming concerns like the rise of Islamophobia, cross-border terrorism, extremism, and instability in the world order, the OIC has become more relevant than ever before. Active engagement in the grouping by India, home to around 10 percent of the Muslims in the world, can add more substance to the existence and working of the OIC.