Culture and peace - UNAOC Resolution and India's Concerns

Why in news?

- At a UNGA session on 'Culture of Peace', India raised concerns over UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) resolutions.
- India criticised the UNAOC for what it called "selectivity" in seeking to protect Abrahamic religions - Islam, Christianity and Judaism - over others.

What is the UNAOC?

- The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was established in 2005.
- It came as a political initiative of Mr. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General.
- It was co-sponsored by the Governments of Spain and Turkey.
- A High-Level Group of experts was formed by Mr. Annan to explore the roots of polarization between societies and cultures today.
- The Report of the High-Level Group provided analysis and put forward practical recommendations.
- This form the basis for the implementation plan of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

What were India's arguments at the recent session?

- The Indian delegate pointed out the previous resolutions of the UNAOC dating back to 2006.
- The resolutions had repeatedly criticized the hatred against Abrahamic religions - "Islamophobia, Christianophobia and anti-Semitism."
- But they had not condemned the attacks on other religious groups including Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists.
    - These have notably suffered terror strikes and seen their shrines destroyed in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- In particular, India said, the UNGA statement welcomed the Kartarpur Gurudwara corridor agreement between India and Pakistan.
- But the UNGA failed to note that Pakistan's government has taken over the management of the Sikh shrine.
    - India called this a contravention of the agreement and a violation of Sikh beliefs.

- India's delegate also accused Pakistan of a "culture of hatred" against "religions in India" and fostering cross-border terrorism.
    - India emphasized that a culture of peace could not exist until this was changed.

How valid are India's concerns?

- India's concerns that UN resolutions portray only three religions as victims of religious hatred are completely valid.
- It is important that they are broadened to include every community that faces religion-based violence.
- It is also important that India thwarts Pakistan's attempts to create a controversy against India by pushing these resolutions as India steps to take its two-year seat at the UN Security Council.
- New Delhi has been concerned by an increase in intrusive language from the UN bodies concerned as well.
    - The UNAOC issued a statement of "grave concern" over the Delhi riots in February 2020 that it said resulted in casualties of "mostly Muslims".
- India is keen to oppose the UNAOC and other UN arms, like the UNHRC, that have criticised the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

What is the need for caution?

- The Indian government must be careful about ensuring that in exposing the UN's "selectivity" it doesn't leave scope for a counter-charge against India.
- For example, the Citizenship (Amendment) Act has been criticised for offering fast-track citizenship to only a select group of religions, leaving out Muslims.
- India cannot call for a culture of peace while Indian States bring laws that seek to make difficult inter-faith marriages.
- In all, India's stance against the UN bodies gains force from its own secular credentials enshrined in the Constitution.
- It is high time that India preserves its own secular ideals and pluralistic ethos.

Source: The Hindu

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