India’s Complex Position on Islamophobia

Why in news?

India’s assertion criticising the OIC Resolution on Islamophobia was valid, but could have made a reference to Indian Muslims.

What is the issue?

- The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has recently adopted a consensus Resolution declaring March 15 annually as the ‘International Day to Combat Islamophobia’.
- The main sponsor of the resolution was Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).
- It was said that the OIC had extensively discussed the proposal with interested delegations.
- There is little doubt that India and the European Union (EU), which had major difficulties with the very basis of the proposal, would have discussed it with the OIC.

What is Islamophobia?

- Islamophobia connotes fear of and prejudice, discrimination and hate speech against Islam.
- Muslims worldwide complain about negative stereotyping of their faith which has got increased since the al Qaeda’s 9/11 terrorist attacks and other instances of terrorist violence undertaken by Islamist groups.
- They assert that these acts are not in keeping with Islam.
- Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan regretted that suicide attacks are equated with Islam and the marginalisation of Muslims in European countries.

What concessions were made by OIC to achieve consensus?

- OIC had to place the resolution within the framework of previous resolutions of a general nature which seek to promote tolerance and religious freedoms and combat discrimination and violence.
- The OIC had to agree to a call for a dialogue for peace based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs.
- The OIC had to withdraw its call for high-visibility events by member states, for curbing Islamophobia.
- It now only wants the observation of March 15 in an appropriate manner.

What about the stand of India and EU with respect to the resolution?

- **India’ stand**- India stated that it was time to acknowledge the prevalence of religiophobia, rather than singling out just one.
- The contention was that phobias are just not against Abrahamic faiths but also against non-Abrahamic religions.

- India's Permanent Representative T.S. Tirumurti mentioned India's historical track record of giving refuge to the prosecuted members of different faiths, specifically mentioning Zoroastrians, Jews and Buddhists.
- What was absent from Mr. Tirumurti's intervention was any reference to Indian Muslims.
- India could have specifically added that it is concerned with Islamophobia because Muslims form a substantial part of the country's plural society for two reasons
    - The word "pluralism" does not find any mention in the Resolution
    - Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of India lies in sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas
- **EU's position**- The EU's opposition to the Resolution stemmed from singling out a particular confession.
- The EU placed its focus on individual rights and freedom and not on protection of religions per se.
- The EU's views on an individual's right to change religion may also not coincide with the view of traditional Islam which does not accept renunciation of a religious belief.

What is China's position?

- China's terrible record of treatment of its Muslims, especially the Uighurs, is well known.
- However, the Chinese mistreatment of its Muslims does not find any mention in the Islamabad declaration.
- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was invited as a special guest at this meeting.
- Also, China was one of the sponsors of the resolution.

References

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/indias-complex-position-on-islamophobia/article65260988.ece
2. https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en

Quick facts

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

- The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest organization after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states.
- The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world.
- The Organization was established upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco in 1969.
- OIC's key bodies
    - The Islamic Summit
    - The Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM)
    - The General Secretariat
    - The Al-Quds Committee
- Specialized organs
    - The Islamic Development Bank
    - The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



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