Kashmir, India and the OIC

What is the issue?

- The 47th session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Council of Foreign Ministers was held at Niamey, Niger.
- India hit out at the OIC for making factually incorrect and unwarranted references to J&K; this necessitates a closer look at India's relations with OIC and its member nations.

What is the OIC?

- The OIC is formerly the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.
- It is the world's second largest inter-governmental organisation after the UN, with a membership of 57 states.
- Its stated objective is "to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world".
- OIC has reserved membership for Muslim-majority countries.
- Russia, Thailand, and a couple of other small countries have Observer status.

What was India's statement?

- OIC had made a reference to India over its policies on J&K.
- To this, in a statement, India advised the OIC to refrain from making such references in future.
- It said it is regrettable that the grouping continues to allow itself to be used by a certain country "which has an abominable record on religious tolerance, radicalism and persecution of minorities".
- This was a reference to Pakistan.

How is India's relationship with the OIC?

- At the 45th session of the Foreign Ministers' Summit of the OIC in 2018, Bangladesh was the host.
- It suggested that India, where more than 10% of the world's Muslims live, should be given Observer status.
- But Pakistan opposed the proposal.
- In 2019, India made its maiden appearance at the OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting, as a "guest of honour".

    - India said then that the invitation was a "welcome recognition of the presence of 185 million Muslims in India".
    - It is also a recognition of the "Muslims' contribution to India's pluralistic ethos, and of India's contribution to the Islamic world".
    - This first-time invitation was seen as a diplomatic victory for New Delhi.
    - This happened especially at a time of India's heightened tensions with Pakistan following the Pulwama attack.
- Notably, Pakistan had opposed the invitation to India.
- Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi boycotted the plenary after the UAE turned down his demand to rescind the invitation to India.

What is the OIC's stand on Kashmir?

- OIC has been generally supportive of Pakistan's stand on Kashmir.
- It has issued statements criticising the alleged Indian "atrocities" in J&K.
- These statements over the last three decades became an annual ritual, and of little significance to India.
- In 2019, after India revoked Article 370 in Kashmir, Pakistan lobbied with the OIC for their condemnation of the move.
    - To Pakistan's surprise, Saudi Arabia and the UAE [both top leaders among the Muslim countries] issued nuanced statements.
    - They were not as harshly critical of New Delhi as Islamabad had hoped.

How is India's relationship with OIC member countries?

- Individually, India has good relations with almost all member nations of the OIC.
- Ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, especially, have looked up significantly in recent years.
- The OIC includes two of India's close neighbours, Bangladesh and Maldives.
    - Indian diplomats say both countries privately admit they do not want to complicate their bilateral ties with India on Kashmir, but play along with OIC.

What is the significance of India's latest statement?

- India has consistently underlined that J&K is an "integral part of India and is a matter strictly internal to India".
- It has maintained its "consistent and well known" stand that the OIC had no locus standi in this issue.
- This time, India went a step ahead. India now sees the duality of the OIC unsound.
- Many of OIC's member countries have good bilateral ties and convey to India

to ignore OIC statements.

- But their stances differ in the joint statements which are largely drafted by Pakistan.
- India also wants to challenge OIC in the Kashmir issue because of the change in administration in the US.
    - Joe Biden administration in the US may have a strong view on human rights in Kashmir.
    - So, it could possibly issue statements that may complicate India's image at the global stage.
- New Delhi is also preparing to take over a non-permanent member's seat at the UN Security Council.
- Given this too, India wants to use its diplomatic clout and goodwill to bury this issue at the global body in the next 2 years.
- India wants to bring up the Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism high on agenda.
- It is in the backdrop of all these perceptions that New Delhi's recent statement targeting the OIC grouping as being led by Pakistan has to be understood.

Source: The Indian Express

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