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## **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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