

## International

# Progress of non-Muslims 'left us in lurch', Malaysia tells Islamic summit

## Iran seeks Muslim deals to cut reliance on US financial system

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Muslim nations need to do more business among themselves, trade in each other's currencies and keep up with non-Islamic countries to stop being left at their mercy, their leaders said yesterday at a summit boycotted by Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi-based Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said on Wednesday it was against the interests of the Muslim world to hold meetings outside the organization, which has for decades acted as the collective Islamic voice.

Both Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan have been frustrated by the OIC's hand-wringing and failure to take action in support of Muslim causes.

Mahathir said the Kuala Lumpur summit, which ends on Saturday, was aimed at understanding why Islam, Muslims and their countries were "in a state of crisis, helpless and unworthy of this great religion". "While we may not have been able to fully dissect all that had caused our pain and anguish, we are mostly in agreement that it is our inability to keep up with the progress and development of the non-Muslims that has left us in the lurch," he said.

"Due to that, Muslims the world over suffer and as many are dependent on the mercy and charity of the non-Muslims. To my mind, we have no choice but to develop and progress as fast as possible."

It was unclear to what extent the leaders would broach the major crises afflicting Muslims, ranging from the age-old disputes in the Middle

East and Kashmir to conflicts in Syria and Yemen, through to the plight of persecuted Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and millions of Uighur Muslims held in camps in China's Xinjiang region.

A question from the audience on the treatment of Uighurs, put to the dais that included Mahathir, Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, was ignored.

### Differences with OIC

Without mentioning the OIC by name, Erdogan said the biggest problem that platforms bringing the Islamic world together faced was a lack of implementation. "If we still haven't made any progress regarding the Palestinian cause, if we still can't stop the exploitation of our resources, if we still can't say 'stop' to the fragmentation of the Muslim world over sectarianism, that's why." Some analysts also suspected that Saudi Arabia's reluctance to attend stemmed from fear of being diplomatically isolated by regional rivals Iran, Qatar and Turkey. Though Saudi-ally Pakistan also opted to stay away, it was agreed that Malaysia, Turkey and Pakistan would jointly establish a communication center to combat Islamophobia.

Malaysia and Turkey formalized separate agreements to pursue research and development in aerospace and defense. Malaysia also struck a deal with Qatar to double the Southeast Asian country's milk production to 50 million liters annually.

Erdogan also called for a reconstitution of the UN Security Council to represent the 1.7



**KUALA LUMPUR:** This handout from Malaysia's Department of Information taken and released yesterday shows Iran's President Hassan Rouhani (3rd left), Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani (4th left), Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (5th left), Malaysia's King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah (6th left), Malaysia's Queen Tunku Azizah Aminah Maimunah Iskandariah (6th right), Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali (5th right), wife of Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Emine Erdogan (4th right), wife of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (3rd right) and Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Wan Azizah Wan Ismail posing for a photo before the opening ceremony of the Kuala Lumpur Summit 2019 in Kuala Lumpur. —AFP

billion people of the Islamic world. China, the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Russia make up the permanent members of the council. "The world is bigger than those five," he said, adding there was also a need for Muslim countries to trade in their

own currencies.

Iranian President Rouhani also called for Muslim countries to enter preferential trade agreements using each other's currencies and to create a special mechanism for banking and financial cooperation. —Reuters

## From Instagram to TikTok: Indians wage online battle against citizenship law

**NEW DELHI/BENGALURU:** As protests rage across Indian universities against a new citizenship law, students have taken to social media to wage battle online and teach people how to organize demonstrations. Instagram is popular with some because it can be used to share pictures and video, while its settings allow protection against the online harassment that users can suffer on other platforms. "I don't like Twitter because each time I open it I see so much hate," said Abdul Rehman, 22, an engineering student at New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University. "There is no way to control who is viewing or sharing my pictures or videos on WhatsApp and most of my audience is not on Facebook."

Tens of thousands of Indians have protested against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), with students at the forefront. Approved by India's president last week, the law paves the way for minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to get Indian citizenship, but critics say it is biased against

Muslims. One protest on Sunday culminated in police storming the Jamia Millia Islamia University, leaving some 200 injured. Current and former students have taken to Instagram, a photo and video sharing platform known for lifestyle content, to express their disapproval. "We millennials are always active on Instagram," said Islam Mirza, who completed a masters in business administration at Jamia earlier this year. "Whether it is to call off the protest, whether it is to organise the protests, whether it is to instruct students what to do or what not to do to help keep the protests peaceful, we use Instagram as a messenger." Many also use the platform to educate others about what they see as potential concerns with the new legislation. While Facebook and its messenger WhatsApp are also being used to drive conversations about the CAA and protests, over half a dozen students from Jamia said Instagram was their preferred choice of social media.

Privacy settings on Instagram offer an escape from trolling or online harassment on platforms such as Twitter, said Torsha Sarkar, a policy officer at the Centre for Internet and Society in Bengaluru. The active presence of film, music and fashion celebrities on Instagram also makes it an appealing platform for young users to post pictures and videos for all to see, unlike Facebook or WhatsApp where conversations are largely private or among a user's close social circle. It's not all one-way traffic though. —Reuters

## Small blasts hit Rakhine town as Myanmar's Suu Kyi visits

**YANGON:** Three small explosions went off in a southern Rakhine town in Myanmar yesterday just before civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi landed there in a rare visit to the conflict-ridden state, a local official said. The blasts happened in the normally quiet town of Manaung on an island off Myanmar's western coast where Suu Kyi was due to open a solar power plant.

"There were three explosions, but no casualties," Win Myint, spokesperson for Rakhine's regional government, said. He said it happened before Suu Kyi arrived, but since they were on the other side of town the event went ahead as planned and she had since left safely on a flight to Yangon.

"This has never happened in Manaung before." No group has yet claimed responsibility for planting the small bombs, which detonated at the side of a road, photos from local media showed. The area has remained largely unscathed by unrest further north, where Myanmar's military is locked in an increasingly vicious conflict with the Arakan Army (AA). The rebel group claims to be

fighting for more autonomy and rights for the ethnic Rakhine Buddhists and garners sympathy from many local people who have long felt marginalized in the Bamar-majority country.

But tens of thousands have fled their homes over the past year and dozens of civilians have been killed. There have been allegations of abuse against both sides. Rights groups say Myanmar's military has abducted, tortured and killed civilian detainees. Nearly 70 local administrators in northern Rakhine tried to resign en masse this week after one of their peers was killed by the military. The army admitted responsibility but said he had been caught in the crossfire, which locals deny.

"We're worried for our lives," said village head Myo Kyaw Aung, one of the administrators of Minbya township who had his resignation refused. The army, meanwhile, points to targeted shootings, roadside bombings and kidnappings by the insurgents. One Indian construction worker died while being held hostage and an MP from Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) has now been held for over six weeks.

A number of hostages seized by the rebels in a raid on a ferry packed with scores of police and soldiers were killed in October, with each side blaming the other. Rakhine state's north was also the epicentre of a bloody military crackdown two years ago that forced some 740,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee over the border into Bangladesh. —AFP