

# The battle for leadership of the Muslim world

## Turkey plants its flag in Christchurch



**W**HEN Turkish vice-president Fuat Oktay and foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu became the first high-level foreign government delegation to travel to Christchurch after the

Muslim countries by speaking out against China's brutal crackdown on Turkic Muslims in the troubled north-western province of Xinjiang. Mr Erdogan's religious and traditional diplomatic effort has seen Turkey build grand mosques and/or cultural centres across the globe in the United States, the Caribbean, Europe, Africa and Asia, finance religious education and restore Ottoman heritage sites. It has pressured governments in Africa and Asia to hand over schools operated by the Hizmet movement led by exiled preacher

USD-100-billion effort to globally propagate ultra-conservative Sunni Islam. Like the Saudis, Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) provides services to Muslim communities, organises pilgrimages to Mecca, trains religious personnel, publishes religious literature, translates the Qur'an into local languages and funds students from across the world to study Islam at Turkish institutions. Turkish Muslim NGOs provide humanitarian assistance in former parts of the Ottoman empire, the Middle East and

support for Qatar in its dispute with the Saudis and Emiratis; differences over Libya, Syria and the Kurds; and Ankara's activist foreign policy. Decades of Saudi funding has left the kingdom's imprint on the global Muslim community. Yet, Turkey's current struggles with Saudi Arabia are more geopolitical than ideological. While Turkey competes geopolitically with the UAE in the Horn of Africa, Libya and Syria, ideologically the two countries' rivalry is between the UAE's effort to establish itself

moderate Islam. The UAE scored a significant success with the first-ever papal visit in February by Pope Francis I during which he signed a Document on Human Fraternity with Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar, the revered 1,000-year-old seat of Sunni Muslim learning. The signing was the result of UAE-funded efforts of Egyptian general-turned-president Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi to depoliticise Islam and gain control of Al-Azhar that Sheikh Al-Tayeb resisted despite supporting Mr Al-Sisi's 2013 military coup.

attacks on two mosques, they were doing more than expressing solidarity with New Zealand's grieving Muslim community. Messrs. Oktay and Cavusoglu were planting Turkey's flag far and wide in a global effort to expand, beyond the Turkic and former Ottoman world, support for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's style of religiously-packaged authoritarian rule, a marriage of Islam and Turkish nationalism. Showing footage of the rampage in Christchurch at a rally in advance of March 31 local elections, Mr Erdogan declared that "there is a benefit in watching this on the screen. Remnants of the Crusaders cannot prevent Turkey's rise."



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan poses with Jordan's King Abdullah and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at a meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Istanbul, Turkey, December 13, 2017. PHOTO: OSMAN ORSAL/REUTERS

Mr Erdogan went on to say that "we have been here for 1,000 years and God willing we will be until doomsday. You will not be able to make Istanbul Constantinople. Your ancestors came and saw that we were here. Some of them returned on foot and some returned in coffins. If you come with the same intent, we will be waiting for you too."

Fethullah Gulen. Mr Erdogan holds Mr Gulen responsible for the failed military coup in Turkey in 2016. On the diplomatic front, Turkey has in recent years opened at least 26 embassies in Africa, expanded the Turkish Airlines network to 55 destinations in Africa, established military bases in Somalia and Qatar, and negotiated a long-term lease for Sudan's Suakin Island in the Red Sea. The Turkish religious campaign takes a leaf out of Saudi Arabia's four-decade-long,

Africa much like the Saudi-led World Muslim League and other Saudi governmental and non-governmental organisations, many of which have been shut down since the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington. Saudi Arabia, since the rise of crown prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2015, has significantly reduced global funding for ultra-conservatism. Nonetheless, Turkey is at loggerheads with Saudi Arabia as well as the UAE over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi; Turkish

as a centre of a quietist, apolitical Islam as opposed to Turkey's activist approach and its support for the Muslim Brotherhood. In contrast to Saudi Arabia that adheres to Wahhabism, an austere ultra-conservative interpretation of the faith, the UAE projects itself and its religiosity as far more modern, tolerant and forward-looking. The UAE's projection goes beyond Prince Mohammed's attempt to shave off the raw edges of Wahhabism in an attempt to present himself as a proponent of what he has termed

To enhance its influence within Al-Azhar and counter that of Saudi Arabia, the UAE has funded Egyptian universities and hospitals and has encouraged Al-Azhar to open a branch in the UAE. The UAE effort paid off when the pope, in a public address, thanked Egyptian judge Mohamed Abdel Salam, an advisor to Sheikh Al-Tayeb who is believed to be close to both the Emiratis and Mr Al-Sisi, for drafting the declaration. "Abdel Salam enabled Al-Sisi to outmanoeuvre Al-Azhar in the struggle for reform," said an influential activist. The Turkey-UAE rivalry has spilt from the geopolitical and ideological into competing versions of Islamic history. Turkey last year renamed the street on which the UAE embassy in Ankara is located after an Ottoman general that was at the centre of a Twitter spat between Mr Erdogan and UAE foreign minister Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan. Mr Erdogan responded angrily to the tweet that accused Fahreddin Pasha, who defended the holy city of Medina against the British in the early 20th century, of abusing the local Arab population and stealing their property as well as sacred relics from the Prophet Muhammad's tomb. The tweet described the general as one of Mr Erdogan's ancestors.

"When my ancestors were defending Medina, you impudent (man), where were yours? Some impertinent man sinks low and goes as far as accusing our ancestors of thievery. What spoiled this man? He was spoiled by oil, by the money he has," Mr Erdogan retorted, referring to Mr Al-Nahyan.

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### WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

# My journey through the mysterious world of autism

**ANTARA MIRZA**  
**O**NE day, when we were very tiny, I remember watching my severely autistic and non-verbal twin brother Ayman during a session with a therapist in this room. The therapist had laid out three plastic cups in front of him on the table and, making sure he was paying attention, overturned each of them to reveal a different snack under each one: peanuts, cashews and crisps. Immediately, I saw a change: a big smile grew on his face, and we had his attention. After covering the snacks, she asked my brother, "Ayman, which snack do you want?" What followed amazed me: Ayman lifted up his arm, and pointed at the cup containing the peanuts. Before this, I had never seen Ayman communicate so directly. Being non-verbal, and having severe learning difficulties, made this all the more difficult. But this therapist had managed to reach him and teach him this skill—one so simple yet

important as pointing. When I got older, I learned the name of this form of therapy: Applied Behavioural Analysis, or ABA; and another important term: Positive Behaviour Support (PBS). ABA is a scientific discipline that helps people to learn methods that will produce an observable change in behaviour. It is well known as a therapy to help autistic people. In the case of Ayman, in order to teach him a communication skill (pointing), the therapist used food, one of his favourite things, to positively reinforce that behaviour. This is a key part of changing the behaviour: if behaviour is quickly followed by a stimulus (in Ayman's case, yummy food!), this will cause an increase in the frequency of that behaviour happening in the future. PBS, on the other hand, is a long-term, person-centred approach to help those with learning disability who are displaying, or at risk of developing, challenging behaviours. Its key



The author with her twin brother Ayman (left). Ayman would often rock back and forth very quickly and with a lot of vigour, hitting his head, for example, against the wall or on the back of the car seat. Through assessments we

learned that there is a sensory need he is trying to fulfil. By providing sensory experiences that he enjoys like listening to music (another big love of Ayman's) and head massages, we are able to help him to meet that need. It is an ongoing journey: he still rocks back and forth and bangs his head, and the same behaviours can have multiple different functions, but we continue to use PBS to help us understand Ayman and his needs. My curiosity about autism continued as I got older. I was led to studying psychology for my Bachelor's degree at university, where I learned about behaviourism, a strand of thought underpinning ABA. After graduating I eventually secured a position as an assistant psychologist within Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as part of the National Health Service (NHS) in London, specifically, the Learning Disability (LD) Team. Here I work with a clinical team consisting of clinical

psychologists, a psychiatrist, and the same kind of therapists who helped Ayman: behavioural analysts. I had the opportunity to visit a boy with autism who had been referred for challenging behaviours, for whom I had created a "choosing board"—a board containing pictures of his favourite activities like playing with slime or baking. During set "choosing times" in his day at home, or at school, he could choose which one he wanted to do. By doing this, the boy could gain some independence and control over his free time. This was successful, and the boy's mother called to tell us that he was much happier and his behaviours had gone down. I am continuing to pursue experience that will help me to understand autism and learning disability, and to help people like Ayman.

Antara Mirza is an Assistant Psychologist with the CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) LD (Learning Disability) Team in London.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**M N ROY**  
(March 21, 1887 – January 26, 1954)  
20th century Indian revolutionary, activist, political theorist and philosopher.

*Freedom, knowledge, truth are values to be appreciated together by living them.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Mined fuel
- 5 "Get out!"
- 10 Singer Guthrie
- 11 Rook's starting space
- 13 Make slow progress
- 14 Baby's toy
- 15 Languages
- 17 Swiss peak
- 18 Treat derisively
- 19 Singer Carly -- Jepsen
- 20 River stopper
- 21 Occupy
- 22 Spring month
- 25 Ninnies
- 26 "It's -- real!"
- 27 Tote
- 28 Deli meat
- 29 Cincinnati team
- 33 Musician Yoko
- 34 Finished
- 35 Least polite
- 37 Finished
- 38 Sound system
- 39 Persia, today
- 40 Louver parts
- 41 Uncool fellow

**DOWN**

- 1 Play groups
- 2 Manmade fiber
- 3 Unaccompanied
- 4 Typed a password, say
- 5 Roller coaster sound
- 6 Shore setting
- 7 Table scrap
- 8 Toronto's province
- 9 Like some bios
- 12 Pushes away
- 16 River of Russia
- 21 Stuck at the airport
- 22 Hates
- 23 Bar snacks
- 24 Change a room
- 25 Bankroll
- 27 Slow musical passages
- 29 Flange
- 30 Play charming
- 31 Moonbased
- 32 Use money
- 36 Chunk of history

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**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

D	A	B	B	L	E	F	A	C	T
A	T	R	A	I	N	I	L	I	E
R	E	A	R	E	D	N	A	N	A
L	U	C	I	D	N	A	M	E	S
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U	S	E	D	A	N	T	L	E	R
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**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott