US & UNESCO

Why in news?

\n\n

US has recently announced its withdrawal from the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

\n\n

What are the recent developments in this regard?

\n\n

\n
- **Palestine** - UNESCO, which designates world heritage spots, accorded recognition in 2011 to Palestine as its 195th member.
\n
- UNESCO is the first U.N. agency to do so.
\n
- This triggered controversies over the historical status of the region's religious symbols.
\n
- And this is also a continuing issue of contention between the already divided Palestinian Authority and Israel.
\n
- The 2012 elevation to a non-member observer status at the UN came as a boost for Palestinians demanding separate statehood.
\n
- **US** - The US had long had stronger ties with Israel and supported its settlements in Palestine.
\n
- Also, U.S. laws bar funding to any UN agency that recognises the Palestinian state.
\n
- Accordingly, the US had stopped funding the UNESCO since its 2011 decision, but the partnership with UNESCO continued.
\n
- It also opposed to the admission of Palestine to world bodies until the question of its UN membership was resolved.
\n

- **Holy sites** - Meanwhile, Arab nations at the UNESCO have sought to fast-track the designation of holy sites as endangered heritage sites.
\n
- They alleged Israel of making attacks on religious sites, affecting their authenticity and integrity.
\n
- **Hebron** - Notably, UNESCO declared a contested shrine in Hebron city as an endangered Palestinian heritage site.
\n
- While most of Hebron is under Palestine administration, the core of the shrine is surrounded by Israeli military guards.
\n
- Also, a resolution last year condemned Israel for hampering access for the Palestinians to Jerusalem’s holy places.
\n

\n\n

What does the US move signify?

\n\n

\n
- Amidst the above developments, US has now decided to withdraw, accusing UNESCO of continuing its "anti-Israel bias".
\n
- With this, the actual withdrawal will take effect on December 31, 2018 and until then it will remain a full member of the body.
\n
- The decision reflects U.S's concerns with mounting arrears at UNESCO, the need for fundamental reform in the organisation, and continuing anti-Israel bias at UNESCO.
\n
- The decision is also an attempt to reassert its geopolitical influence in West Asia.
\n

\n\n

What lies ahead?

\n\n

\n
- It is to be noted that US has indicated its desire to remain engaged with UNESCO as a non-member observer state.
\n
- This is to contribute its views and expertise on some important issues

undertaken by the organisation.
\n
- It would be hasty to view US's exit from the UNESCO as a point of no return.
\n
- Because, earlier in 1984, the U.S. had withdrawn from the UNESCO, accusing it of favouring the Soviet Union; nevertheless it rejoined the U.N. body in 2002.
\n
- With increasing need for communities to stress their historical and cultural identities in globalisation era, UNESCO has a balancing role to play.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

