

US DECIDES TO REJOIN UNESCO

Why in news?

- UN cultural and scientific agency UNESCO announced that the United States plans to re-join and pay more than \$600 million in back dues.

About

- UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- It is **specialized agency of the United Nations (UN)**.
- The constitution, which entered into force in 1946, called for the promotion of international collaboration in education, science, and culture.
- The agency's **permanent headquarters are in Paris, France**.
- **Parent Organisation** - United Nations Economic and Social Council
- **Goal**
 - The primary goals of UNESCO are to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, and culture, and to promote sustainable development and intercultural dialogue.
 - UNESCO believes that these areas are crucial for building a more just, peaceful, and inclusive world.

Background: US leaving UNESCO

- **Background**
 - The US and Israel stopped funding UNESCO after it voted to include Palestine as a member state in 2011.
 - The Trump administration decided in 2017 to withdraw from the agency altogether the following year.
 - The United States had previously withdrawn from UNESCO in 1984 during the Cold War era.
 - The country rejoined the organization in 2003 under the administration of President George W. Bush.

• **Reasons**

- One of the main reasons was concerns over the organization's perceived anti-Israel bias.
- The U.S. government criticized UNESCO for its handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its recognition of Palestine as a member state.
- Another factor was financial concerns.
- United States had been contributing a significant portion of UNESCO's budget.
- U.S. government had concerns about fiscal management and accountability within UNESCO.
- Furthermore, the decision to withdraw was also influenced by a broader scepticism towards multilateral institutions and a desire to reassess and prioritize U.S. engagement and funding in international organizations.

Why did US decided to rejoin the organisation?

- The decision to return was motivated by concern that China is filling the gap left by the US in UNESCO policymaking, notably in **setting standards for artificial intelligence and technology education** around the world.

ADOPTING AI INTO AUDIT TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVENESS

Why in News?

- As artificial intelligence (AI) is making “greater inroads” into governance, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India said that Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) must prepare themselves for auditing AI-based governance systems.
- He was addressing the second SAI20 Summit of the SAI20 Engagement Group under the Indian Presidency of the G20.

About SAI20:

- The SAI20 Engagement Group of G20 was established during 2022 during **Indonesia’s** Presidency of the G20.
- The constitution of SAI20 stems from **a recognition of the role of SAIs** in promoting the good governance, efficiency, accountability, and transparency of public administration, and supporting SDG implementation.

- This mandate is achieved through **engaging actively and effectively with the entire spectrum of stakeholders**, from audited entities and governments to media and the civil society.

The Second SAI20 Summit:

- It began in **Goa** under India's G20 Presidency and aligned with the main theme of the Indian Presidency of G20 which is `Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam` - **the World as One Earth, One Family and One Future**.
- According to the Indian CAG, the SAIs has a crucial role to play in the **audit of Blue Economy and Responsible AI** to optimise their positive impact on humankind.

Need for Responsible AI:

- AI refers to information-processing systems and technologies that **integrate models and algorithms** to learn and to perform **cognitive tasks** leading to outcomes such as **prediction and decision-making**.
- **Machine Learning** (ML is based on the creation of algorithms) and **Deep Learning** [DL algorithms learn or improve themselves through layers of Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs)] are two key techniques/subsets of AI.
- The public sector entities have started using AI, especially ML algorithms, **to improve the efficiency of public services delivery at lower costs**.
- However, the **significant risks associated** [**biased data** used as inputs to an algorithm, inner workings (black-box nature) of the algorithms] with use of AI in delivery of public services also need to be carefully considered.

Responsible AI Stands on 4 Pillars:

- **Organisational democratisation** that empowers and encourages individuals to raise concerns;
- **Systems that enable AI to flourish;**
- Systems and platforms that are **trustworthy and explainable** by design; and
- Articulation of responsible AI Mission that is anchored in **organisational and ethical values**.

The Objectives of the Engagement Group of SAI20 on Responsible AI:

- **Governance issues** - fairness, transparency, accountability, data privacy and security, human rights and safety - to be examined during the audit of AI systems.

- **Performance issues** - economy in terms of reduced costs, efficiency in terms of productivity gains, effectiveness in terms of achievement of intended objectives - to be examined during the audit of AI systems.
- **Leveraging AI for more effective and efficient audit**, through its use in different stages of the audit process.
- **Mechanisms for capacity development and knowledge sharing** across SAIs, related to audit in environments with extensive use of AI and for application of AI in audit.

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME (UNODC)

Dubai Customs recently celebrated the graduation of participants from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) programme.



About United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):

- UNODC is a **global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime**, in addition to being responsible for **implementing the United Nations lead programme on terrorism**.
- It was **established in 1997 through a merger between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention**.
- **Headquarters: Vienna, Austria**
- **Functions:**
 - UNODC works to **educate people** throughout the world **about the dangers of drug abuse**.
 - **Strengthen international action against illicit drug production and trafficking and drug-related crime**.
 - It also works to **improve crime prevention and assist with criminal justice reform** in order to strengthen the rule of law, promote stable and viable criminal justice systems and combat the growing threats of transnational organized crime and corruption.
 - **In 2002, the UN General Assembly approved an expanded programme of activities for the Terrorism Prevention Branch of UNODC**. The activities focus on **providing assistance to**

States, on request, in ratifying and implementing the eighteen universal legal instruments against terrorism.

- **Working:**
 - UNODC has **20 field offices covering over 150 countries.**
 - By **working directly with Governments and non-governmental organizations**, UNODC field staff develops and implement drug control and crime prevention programmes tailored to countries' particular needs.
 - **Funding:** UNODC **relies on voluntary contributions, mainly from governments**, to carry out the majority of our work.
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WHAT IS CHIKUNGUNYA?

According to a recently published research paper, a human clinical trial of a vaccine candidate to prevent chikungunya has returned a **99% immune response.**



About Chikungunya:

- It is a **viral disease** transmitted to humans **through the bites of mosquitoes infected with the chikungunya virus.**
 - The word comes from the African Makonde language and means "bent over in pain."
 - It is most commonly transmitted by mosquitoes, *Aedes (Stegomyia) aegypti* and *Aedes (Stegomyia) albopictus*, which can **also transmit dengue and Zika viruses.**
 - It was **first described during an outbreak in southern Tanzania in 1952** and has **now been identified in** nearly 40 countries in **Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.**
 - **Symptoms:**
 - Symptoms **usually begin 4 to 8 days after a mosquito bite** but can appear anywhere from 2 to 12 days.
 - The **most common symptom is an abrupt onset of fever**, often accompanied by **joint pain.**
 - Other symptoms include **muscle pain, headache, nausea, fatigue, and rash.**
 - **Serious complications are uncommon**, but atypical severe cases can cause **long-term symptoms and even death**, especially in older people.
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- **Treatment:**

- There is currently no approved vaccine or specific treatment for chikungunya virus infections.
 - The goal of treatment for the infection is to relieve symptoms with rest, fluids and drugs.
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NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB)

Honduras President recently requested the country's admission to the BRICS-led New Development Bank (NDB).



- **About New Development Bank (NDB):**

- NDB, formerly referred to as the BRICS Development Bank, is a multilateral development bank established by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
 - **Objective: Financing infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries.**
 - The idea of setting up NDB was first conceived in 2012 during BRICS Summit in New Delhi, India. The Bank formally came into existence as a legal entity in 2015.
 - **Headquarters: Shanghai, China**
 - The first regional office of the NDB was setup in Johannesburg, South Africa. The second regional office was established in 2019 in São Paulo, Brazil, followed by Moscow, Russia.
 - **Capital:** The Bank has an initial authorized capital of 100 billion dollars and an initial subscribed capital of 50 billion dollars.
 - **Membership in NDB is open to any member of the United Nations.**
 - **Governance Structure:**
 - The Bank is governed by a Board of Governors made up of the finance ministers of the five BRICS countries, and a Board of Directors.
 - Voting power within the Board is based on each country's shares in the bank.
 - While new members can join the NDB, the five BRICS countries will retain a minimum of 55% of total shares.
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- The NDB's management includes a **presidency which rotates among BRICS members, and four vice presidents** who are selected from the remaining BRICS countries.
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GLOBAL SLAVERY INDEX 2023

According to Global Slavery Index 2023, on any given day in 2021, as many as 50 million people were living in “modern slavery”.



About Global Slavery Index 2023:

- It is the **fifth edition** of the Global Slavery Index and is based on the 2022 estimates.
- The index presents a **global picture of modern slavery**.
- It is constructed by **Walk Free**, a human rights organisation and is based on data provided by the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, which, in turn, is produced by the **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, Walk Free, and **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**.

What are the country-wise findings?

- **There are three sets of key findings.**
 - **The worst offenders are countries like** North Korea, Eritrea Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Turkey Tajikistan.
 - **Lowest prevalence:** Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden
 - **Maximum number of people** living in modern slavery: India, China, North Korea, Pakistan, Russia Indonesia

What is Modern slavery?

- It refers to **situations of exploitation** that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, or abuses of power.
 - It is an umbrella term and includes a whole variety of abuses such as **forced labour, forced marriage, debt bondage, sexual exploitation**, human trafficking, slavery-like practices, forced or servile marriage, and the **sale and exploitation of children**.
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POSHAN TRACKER APP

More than 57,000 migrant workers have registered for the special one nation one Anganwadi programme by using the Poshan Tracker App on mobile phones.



About Poshan Tracker App:

- This application provides a **360-degree view of the activities of the Anganwadi Centre** (child care centers), service deliveries of Anganwadi Workers and complete beneficiary management for **pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under six**.
- It also **digitizes and automates physical registers** used by workers to help improve the quality of their work.
- The **Anganwadi workers are being provided smartphones** procured through Government e-Market (GeM) for efficient service delivery.
- A **nodal person** has also been appointed for **providing technical support** and resolving any issue with downloading the new Poshan Tracker application and its functioning in each state.
- The sources that each migrant worker who had registered in their original state could go to the nearest Anganwadi in their current place of residence and avail of the schemes and services offered.
- It was launched by the **Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD)**.

What is Poshan Abhiyaan?

- It was launched by the Prime Minister of India on 8th March 2018 and has been instrumental in ensuring people's participation and bringing the **discourse on nutrition to the forefront**.
- It was launched to **improve nutritional outcomes holistically**.
- The focus of Abhiyaan is to emphasize the nutritional status of **adolescent girls, pregnant women, lactating mothers and children from 0-6 years of age**.
- The programme, through the use of technology, convergence and community involvement with a targeted approach strives:
 - To **reduce the level of stunting, under nutrition, Anaemia and low birth weight** in children.

EXERCISE EKUVERIN

The joint military exercise “Ekuverin” between the Indian Army & the Maldives National Defence Force has commenced at Chaubatia, Uttarakhand from 11 to 24 June 2023.



About Exercise Ekuverin:

- It is the 12th edition of a joint military exercise between India and Maldives.
- Ekuverin meaning ‘Friends’ is a bilateral annual exercise conducted alternatively in India and Maldives.
- The exercise is aimed at enhancing **interoperability in Counter Insurgency/ Counter Terrorism Operations** under the UN mandate and carrying out joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief operations.
- The focus is to share **best practices and enhance coordination and cooperation** between both the forces at tactical level.
- The defence cooperation between the two countries extends from joint exercises to assisting the Maldives with defence training and equipment requirements.
- Both nations have very close and friendly relations in economic, cultural and military cooperation.
- ‘Ex Ekuverin’ will assist in further bolstering these ties between the two nations.