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## USA Opposes Cuba in UNHRC

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### Why in News

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The **United States of America** has urged **United Nations** members not to support Cuba's bid to join the **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)**.

### Key Points

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- The USA has accused Cuba of "**trafficking**" its doctors under the guise of humanitarian missions.
  - Cuba's **sale of medical services** is its **main source of foreign exchange**.
  - Cuba has a generally respected healthcare system with 90,000 medical workers for a population of 1.1 crore.
  - It has a **high life expectancy** (79.74 years in 2016) and a **low infant mortality rate** (around 4.76 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013).
- Cuba has applied to fill one of the **regional vacancies for 2021-2023**.  
It was a member of the UNHRC in **2014-2016** and **2017-2019**.

- The USA and Cuba have had a strained relationship since the Cuban Revolution in



- The USA **severed diplomatic ties** with Cuba after the revolution.
- It had also placed a **trade embargo** on Cuba which was **eased in 2000** and again in **2014**. Travel restrictions, trade sanctions, restrictions on remittances to Cuba were partially lifted during these times.
- The sanctions were **reinstated in 2017**.
- The Cuba-US relationship also suffered during the **Cuban Missile crisis in 1962**.
- The USA **accuses** Cuba of **human rights violations** and **dictatorship** as it has a leftist authoritarian regime.
- A large number of Cubans have **migrated to the USA** after the Cuban revolution. This includes **supporters of the overthrown regime**, those whose **property had been confiscated** by the present Cuban socialist government and those in search of **better employment and living conditions**.
- Earlier, the **USA had also criticized Qatar and South Africa for accepting doctors** from Cuba to battle Covid-19.

It had also **blacklisted Cuba's defense minister**, accusing him of human rights violations and supporting socialist Venezuelan President.

## India and Cuba

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- India shares **close, warm and historical relations** with Cuba and both countries are founding members of the **Non-Aligned Movement**.

- In 1959, the Cuban-Argentinean guerrilla commander **Che Guevara** paid a **diplomatic visit to India** and was welcomed by the then **Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru**.
- In 2019, India supported the resolutions in the **UN General Assembly** calling for lifting of US sanctions against Cuba..
- India and Cuba agreed to collaborate in the areas of **Biotechnology, Homeopathy and the traditional system of medicine** during the visit of the President of India to Cuba in 2019.

## **United Nations Human Rights Council**

- **About:** The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a United Nations body whose mission is **to promote and protect human rights around the world.**
- **Function:**
  - **The main mechanisms of working of UNHRC are**
    - **Universal Periodic Review** mechanism which serves to assess the human rights situations in all United Nations Member States.
    - **Advisory Committee** which serves as the Council's "think tank" providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues.
    - **Complaint Procedure** which allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Council.
  - The Human Rights Council also works with the **UN Special Procedures** established by the former Commission on Human Rights.  
The special procedures of the Human Rights Council are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective.
- **Membership:** The UNHRC has **47 members** elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis from 5 groups.
  - To become a member, a country must receive the votes of at least 96 of the 191 states of the UN General Assembly (an absolute majority).
  - The members are elected by direct and secret ballot for a period of **three years**, with a maximum of two consecutive terms.
  - In electing Council members, the resolution provides that General Assembly members "shall take into account the candidates' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto."
  - The UNHRC holds **regular sessions** three times a year, in March, June, and September.

- **Recent:** The US withdrew from UNHRC in 2018, accusing it of bias and hypocrisy.  
Venezuela in 2019 won a seat on the council for 2020-2022 despite criticism of its human rights record. This was also highly opposed by the USA.

## Way Forward

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- This attempt of the USA to prevent Cuba from joining UNHRC can further **strain the relationship** between the two countries.
- As a large population of **Cuban immigrants** and people with Cuban roots (0.58% of total US population in 2010) reside in the USA, it is for the sake of **democracy and spirit of internationalism** that the two countries make efforts towards reconciliation.
- As **India** is having ties with both the countries it will be difficult for it to maintain this status if the tension between the two countries escalates.

**Source: TH**