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Pakistan Re-elected to the UNHRC

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Why in News

Pakistan is currently serving on **the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** since 1st January, 2018. With its re-election, Pakistan will continue as a member for another **three-year term commencing on 1st January, 2021.**

A total of **Fifteen countries were elected to the 47-nation council**. Russia and Cuba were elected unopposed. Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Nepal and China were elected from the Asia-Pacific region.

Key Points

- Pakistan has been re-elected despite **opposition from activist groups** over its abysmal human rights records. This is the **fifth time** that Pakistan has been elected to the UNHRC.

According to the British Government's **Foreign and Commonwealth Office Report** titled '**Human Rights and Democracy**', there were serious human rights concerns and violations in Pakistan in 2019, including restrictions on civic space and freedom of expression, intolerance and direct and open discrimination towards minorities.

- **Concerns:**
 - **Countries with Dubious Record:** With a number of countries with questionable rights records being elected, the current system of entry to **UNHRC is in serious need of reform.**

The election of states such as **China and Russia** “damages the reputation of the HRC, its standing within the international human rights committee and beyond”.
 - **Non-competitive Elections:** Problem of election without opposition.
 - For example, the Eastern European group had two available seats but only two countries were nominated to fill those positions, meaning there was no competition for the spots.
 - Except for the Asia-Pacific contest, the election of 15 members to the 47-member Human Rights Council was decided in advance because all the other regional groups had **unopposed states.**
- **The Other View:** Electing nations with dubious human rights records has some **positives.**

There is a silver lining to repressive countries being elected to the council – their position as the supposed guardian of human rights makes it far **more difficult for them to hide their own human rights abuses.**

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

- It was established in **2006.**
- **Headquarter:** Geneva, Switzerland
- **Aim:** Promoting and protecting human rights around the globe, as well as investigating alleged human rights violations.
- **Features:** The UNHRC has **47 members** elected for staggered three-year terms on a regional group basis from 5 groups.
 - **Membership:** 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).
 - According to **Resolution 60/251**, which created the council, members are elected directly by secret ballot by the majority of the UN General Assembly. Membership has to be **equally distributed geographically.**
 - **Five regional groups for membership:** Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Europe and Eastern Europe.
 - The members are elected for a period of **three years**, with a **maximum of two consecutive terms.**
 - **Sessions:** The UNHRC holds **regular sessions** three times a year, in March, June, and September.
 - The council also carries out the **Universal Periodic Review** of all UN member states, which allows civil society groups to bring accusations of human rights violations in member states to the attention of the UN.

Way Forward

- The USA withdrew from the UNHRC in 2018 citing its ineffectiveness and bias. For India it is a testing time as Pakistan got re-elected despite dubious status regarding human rights.
- However, India's commitment towards respecting institutions of global governance mandates to have a critical voice against some events instead of quitting the membership without reasons backed by principles.

Source: TH