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UNESCO appears to be emerging from crisis

PARIS, May 26: UNESCO appears to be emerging from three years of crisis, in which it lost the United States, Britain and Singapore — and 30 per cent of its budget — rather like a convalescent on the road to recovery, reports AFP.

Despite charges that it is excessively political and badly run, its 50-member executive council here last week survived withdrawal threats by other nations, at least for now, agreed that Britain become an observer, and trimmed its spending targets by 17 million dollars out of 307 millions.

A majority of delegates, despite obvious tension and sometimes sharp exchanges, found the session "smooth" and "very positive".

The issue of a successor to Director General Amadou Matar Mbow of Senegal, whose role has been widely criticised, was discussed on the side-

lines.

But no country adopted an official position and candidates will not be sought until the council's next session in September. The final decision will be taken by UNESCO's next general conference in autumn 1987.

Japan was among nations with a wait-and-see attitude until this conference and leading critics who remain members — like Sweden and West Germany — appeared to have decided to fight for reform rather than slam the door.

Most western delegates, like those from the Third World and the socialist countries, reaffirmed their attachment to UNESCO — the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation — while making specific appeals.

These were that UNESCO for sake of academic studies on world problems in which

it seemed to delight, to concentrate more on concrete objectives like the struggle against illiteracy and the safeguarding of great historic monuments.

All delegates stressed that even if UNESCO remained imperfect, it had a major role in international co-operation.

Thus after sharp and difficult discussions the council accepted the British request for observer facilities.

The Afro-Arab group initially wanted to "teach lesson" to British Premier Margaret Thatcher, who in March criticised the international convention giving immunity to diplomats at UNESCO by putting off discussion until autumn.

But the council came down on the side of the moderates, in order not to cut off the British intellectual community, and in the hope of eventually seeing Britain back in the fold.

With austerity, meanwhile, the new key word, Ivory Coast delegate Paul Yao Akoto summed up a general feeling that "UNESCO is not ready to die, because in spite of appearances we still all believe in it."

The council initiated economies of 17 million dollars, proposed by Mr. Mbow, from an initial 307 million budget agreed last November. This will affect its 14 major programmes equally.

Some 558 jobs out of a worldwide total of around 3,000 — 230 effectively filled — have been frozen in recent years, though extensive redeployment and negotiated departures mean only 14 people will be made redundant by the end of this year.

Officials point to a different outcome after the US withdrawal from the international labour organisation, which led to 100 redundancies.