Escalation of Russia-Ukraine conflict

Why in news?

\n\n

Russia recently captured three Ukrainian naval ships in the disputed Azov Sea which has refocussed international attention on the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

\n\n

What is the background?

\n\n

\n
- Ukraine was one of the republics within the USSR during the cold war days, and has remained a strong ally of Russia ever since, till 2013.
\n
- While it was planning to sing an association agreement with the European Union in 2013, Russia sternly objected to it, leading to tensions.
\n
- Russia subsequently annexed “Crimea” (Russian speaking province in Ukraine) by force and declared its sovereignty over it with people’s support.
\n
- The resultant conflict has so far claimed about 10,000 lives and displaced millions with no lasting resolution in sight.
\n
- Though the 2014-15 **Minsk peace accords** prohibited air strikes and heavy artillery firing, the dispute still prevails as a low-intensity combat.
\n

\n\n

What is the recent conflict?

\n\n

\n
- The **Sea of Azov** is a shallow body of water that Ukraine shares with Russia.
\n
- Its only access to the open seas is through the Kerch Strait, which connects it to the Black Sea.

\n
- After Crimea’s annexation in 2014, Russia gained control over both sides of the Kerch strait.
\n
- In May 2018, Russian opened a 12-mile-long bridge over the Kerch Strait, which has also become the physical gateway to the Sea of Azov.
\n

\n\n



\n\n

\n
- To prevent the Ukrainian boats from passing under the bridge, Russia placed a cargo ship below it.
\n
- In late September, two Ukrainian vessels had successfully travelled from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov, exercising Ukraine's maritime rights under international law.
\n
- Recently, three more Ukrainian vessels attempted to make the same journey.
\n
- But the Russian coast guard intercepted the Ukrainians saying that unlike the previous passage, the Ukrainian vessels had failed to request permission and ignored orders to stop.
\n
- However, Ukraine insists that the patrol of the Kerch Strait was authorised under a bilateral agreement with Moscow.
\n
- Thus the naval skirmish over the Sea of Azov proves again the Russia’s irreversibility of its annexation of Crimea.
\n

\n\n

What is the consequence?

\n\n

\n
- Ukraine has declared martial law and demanded that the sailors be treated as prisoners of war.
\n
- The Crimean court has ordered many of them to be held in pre-trial detention, charging them with illegally entering its territorial waters.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- UN Security Council and NATO called on both Russia and Ukraine to de-escalate tensions.
\n
- Russia has not softened its stance, despite the hardships from the economic sanctions since its Crimea’s occupation.
\n
- Thus, greater diplomatic engagement between the two sides and the preference for dialogue over confrontation should be made for a speedy resolution of the conflict.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

