Fall of Mariupol

Why in news?

The surrender of defensive forces in Mariupol likely marks the end of fighting in the eastern Ukrainian city that has been under Russian siege.

What about the city of Mariupol?

- Mariupol sits on the coast of the Azov Sea between the Crimean peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, and the self-declared Donetsk republic.
- Named after Maria Feodorovna, the 18th century Russian empress, Mariupol was part of the Azov Governorate of imperial Russia.
- Over the years, it emerged as one of the biggest trading centres on the Black Sea and Azov coasts.
- By the late 19th century, the city became a steel manufacturing hub, attracting thousands of workers from around the region.
- During the Second World War, Mariupol was occupied by the German Nazis, for almost two years.
- Mariupol, the largest port of the Sea of Azov, was the industrial engine of eastern Ukraine.
- But everything would change in 2014 after the so-called “Euromaidan revolution” and fell into the hands of pro-Russian rebels.
- In June 2014, the rebels retreated from the city, giving it back to the Ukrainian authorities.

Why is the city of Mariupol critical for Russia?

- **Separation of Donbas from Ukraine**- The city is part of the areas claimed by the Donetsk republic.
- So if Mr. Putin’s actual military goal is separating the entire Donbas region from Ukraine, he would need Mariupol.
- **Denazification-** The city hosts the headquarters of the Azov Battalion which is a local neo-Nazi militia.
- As denazification is one of the declared goals of Russia’s invasion, they would want to take over the city and declare victory over the neo-Nazi group.
- **Establishing land bridge**- The strategic location of Mariupol is critical for Russia if it wants to establish a land bridge from Donbas to Crimea.
- **Controlling Black Sea**- With Mariupol in their hand, the Russians would be in control of almost 80% of the Black Sea coast.
- With many of the fighters ending the fight and allowing themselves to be evacuated to the Russia-controlled territories of Donbas, the whole city is now in the hands of the Russians.

What does this hold for Russia?

- Russia has suffered several setbacks in its invasion of Ukraine.
- It started a three-front war but was met with fierce Ukrainian resistance in the north and east.
- Its battleground focus is now almost entirely on the Donbas region where Russian troops are making incremental advances.
- Now, with Mariupol under its control, Russia can free up resources to move to its next target, which suggests that the war could grind on.
- Despite the West's massive financial and military support, Ukraine keeps losing territories.
- The invasion has already prompted Finland and Sweden, which have historically stayed out of military alliances, to formally seek NATO membership.
- Ukraine is losing territories, Russia is witnessing another round of NATO's enlargement, and Europe, battered by inflation and an energy crisis, is likely to be facing prolonged instability and conflicts.

References

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