

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

❖ Context

- A senior Japanese official said recently that **Japan has still not given up hope that India might reconsider joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** from which it opted out in 2019.

❖ Key Highlights

- **Staying out of the RCEP** could impact "India-Japan collaborations in other countries" and make it more difficult for products that have an Indian component to be sold easily in RCEP markets due to the mega deal's "Rules of Origin" clause.
- **Japan has been trying to persuade India to join the RCEP** since the beginning of the negotiation, with one of its intentions attempting to counter China's "influence" under the framework.
- **India dropped out of the RCEP negotiation in November 2019** after seven years of marathon talks.
- Behind the decision was India's long-standing protectionism.



❖ About RCEP

- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- **Members:**
 - It is a **trade deal between sixteen countries** namely 10 countries of **ASEAN** (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) and **China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.**
- **Aims and Objectives:**
 - To **lower Tariffs, open up trade in services and promote investment** to help emerging economies catch up with the rest of the world.
 - To **help reduce costs and time for companies** by allowing them to export a product anywhere within the bloc without meeting separate requirements for each country.
 - It also **touches on intellectual property**, but will not cover environmental protections and labor rights.
- **Significance:**
 - RCEP will **cover about 30% of global gross domestic product (GDP)**, worth \$26.2 trillion and **nearly a third of the world's population**, some 2.2 billion people.
 - Under RCEP, around 90% of trade tariffs within the bloc will eventually be eliminated.

Boma Capturing Technique

❖ Context

- Boma technique **adopted for translocating deer from Keoladeo National Park in Rajasthan's Bharatpur district to improve the prey base in Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve**, situated 450 km away.

❖ About Boma Capturing Technique

- The Boma capturing technique, which is **popular in Africa**, involves **luring animals into an enclosure by chasing them through a funnel-like fencing.**
- The funnel tapers, supported with grass mats and green net to make it opaque for animals, which are then herded into a large vehicle for transport to another location.
- This old technique **was earlier utilized to capture wild elephants for training and service.**
- **Significance of this transfer**
 - This transfer **will lead to herbivores populating the Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve** ahead of the proposed shifting of two tigers to Mukundara.

❖ Mukundara Hills National Park

- It is a **national park in Rajasthan, India.**
- It was **established in 2004**
- It consists of three wildlife sanctuaries: Darrah Wildlife Sanctuary, National Chambal Sanctuary, and Jawahar Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- It is located in the Khathiar-Gir dry deciduous forests.
- The reserve is located on the **eastern bank of the Chambal River** and is drained by its tributaries.
- The park is situated in a valley formed by two parallel mountains viz. Mukundra and Gargola.
- **Mukandara Hills National Park** was once considered for the **reintroduction of the Asiatic lion.**



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❖ Keoladeo National Park

- Located in **Bharatpur, Rajasthan**.
- It is a **man-made and man-managed wetland**.
- It was declared as a protected sanctuary in 1971.
- It is also a **World Heritage Site**.
- It **hosts thousands of birds**, especially during the winter season.
- Over 350 species of birds are known to be resident.
- One-third of the Park is a wetland with mounds and open water with or without submerged or emergent plants.



More Farmers in Maharashtra Turning to Private Moneylenders

❖ Context

- According to the data presented in the **State's Economic Survey 2021-22**, the **number of individuals** seeking loans from licensed private money lenders in Maharashtra **increased by 27 %** in 2021.

❖ Key Highlights

- The **loan amount** from licensed private moneylenders **rose by 42%**.
- **Majority** of these individuals seeking loans are **small and marginal farmers**.
- Dependence of small and marginal farmers in the State on private money lenders multiplied due to **Covid-led lockdowns, closure of markets, and unseasonal rains**.
- The actual ground figure may be much higher as number of licensed money lenders is just the tip of the iceberg, according to the farm leaders.

❖ State's Role in Farm Loans

- Apart from **agriculture and non-agricultural credit societies**, the State allows **licensed moneylenders** to provide loans to individuals.
- For this purpose, licences are issued by the office of the Commissioner for Co-operation and Registrar Co-operative Societies.
- **Cooperatives** is a state subject under entry 32 of the State list of Schedule VII of the Constitution.

❖ Loan for Non-farming Needs

- The **Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households and Land and Holdings of Households in Rural India, 2019 (NSS 77th round)** data show that small landholding households have to avail of loans for:
 - Medical expenditure for hospitalisation, doctor's fees, purchase of medicines, medical diagnostic tests like scans, X-rays, ECG, EEG, and other pathological tests .
 - Purchase of durable household assets, clothing for use of the household, etc.

❖ Small and Marginal Farmers

- The agricultural census has categorised **marginal farmers** who have **less than 1 hectare of land** and those holding **1-2 hectares** are considered **small farmers**. More than 86 % of farmers in the country are small and marginal.

❖ Farmer Suicides in Maharashtra

- In **January-December 2020**, about **2,547** farmers ended their lives in Maharashtra while in **January-November 2021**, **2,489** farmers committed suicides.

News in Between the Lines

Exercise LAMITIYE-2022



❖ Context

- Recently, An **Indian Army contingent arrived in Seychelles** for the **ninth edition** of the Joint Military Exercise Lamitiye 2022.

❖ Key Highlights

- This exercise is **between the Indian Army and Seychelles Defense Forces (SDF)**.
- The exercise is being conducted at the Seychelles Defence Academy (SDA) from **March 22 to 31**.
- The Indian Army contingent will be represented by the **2/3 GORKHA RIFLES group (PIRKANTHI Battalion)**.
- It is a **biennial training event** being conducted in Seychelles since 2001.
- The **10-day-long joint exercise** will include:
 - Field training exercises.
 - Combat discussions.
 - Lectures, demonstrations and culminate with a two days validation exercise.

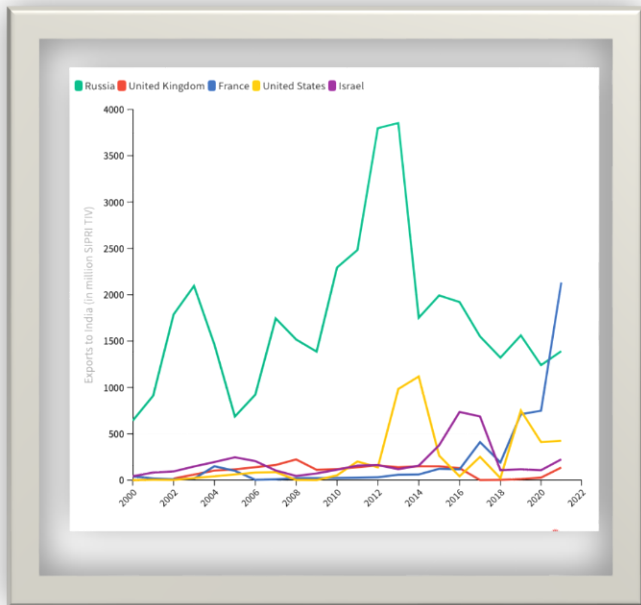
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- **Objective:**
 - To **build and promote bilateral military relations** in addition to exchanging skills, experiences and good practices between both armies.
 - To **share experiences gained during various operations** against **hostile forces in a semi-urban environment** and enhance the capability to conduct joint operations.
- **Significance:**
 - It is crucial and significant in terms of **security challenges faced by both the nations in the backdrop of the current global situation** and growing security concerns in the Indian Ocean Region.

India Reduced Arms Imports from Russia



❖ Context

- According to a report released recently, by **Stockholm-based defence think-tank SIPRI**, Russia's share of arm imports to India fell from 69 per cent in 2012-17 to 46 per cent in 2017-21.

❖ Key Highlights

- Between 2012-16 and 2017-21 Indian arms imports decreased by **21 per cent**.
- Despite this, **India was the world's largest importer of major arms in 2017-21** and accounted for **11 per cent of total global arms imports** in the period.
- Russia was the largest supplier of major arms to India in both 2012-16 and 2017-21, but **India's imports of Russian arms dropped by 47 per cent between the two periods**.
- India's arms imports from **France increased more than tenfold**, making it India's second largest arms supplier in 2017-21.
- Russia's exports in 2017-21 were more concentrated as four states-India, China, Egypt and Algeria-together received 73 per cent of total Russian arms exports.
- **India's Indigenization Efforts:**
 - India's total volume of imports fell by 21% from 2012 to 2016.
 - This demonstrates the push given by the government to promote the manufacturing of arms and weapons systems indigenously.
 - Around 68% of the capital budget for 2022-23 is allocated for domestic manufacturing industries.
- **Top 5 Arms Importers:**
 - India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Australia and China.
 - Together received 38 per cent of total global arms imports in 2017-21.
- **Top 5 Arms Exporter:**
 - United States, Russia, France, China and Germany.

Finlandization



❖ Context

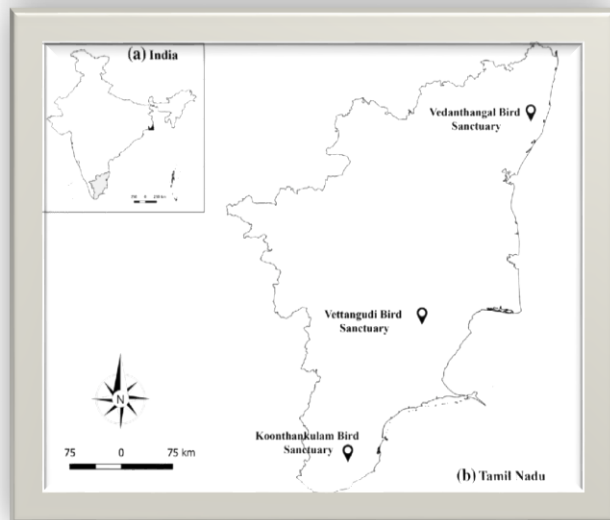
- Despite several rounds of talks between the representatives of Russia and Ukraine, it remains unclear when and how the war might end.
- Among the **scenarios that have been seen as potentially workable is the "Finlandization" of Ukraine**.

❖ Finlandization Model

- It was **proposed earlier in 2014**, the year Russia annexed Crimea and fighting broke out in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.
- '**Finlandization**' refers to the policy of **strict neutrality between Moscow and the West** that Finland followed during the decades of the Cold War.
- It was enshrined in a 1948 treaty with Moscow when tensions between the Soviet Union and the West were at a high.
- The treaty ensured Finland that unlike other countries in Eastern Europe, **it would not face a Soviet invasion**, but in return, **it agreed to stay out of NATO** and allowed the giant next door to exercise significant influence over its domestic and foreign policy.



Vedanthangal Bird sanctuary



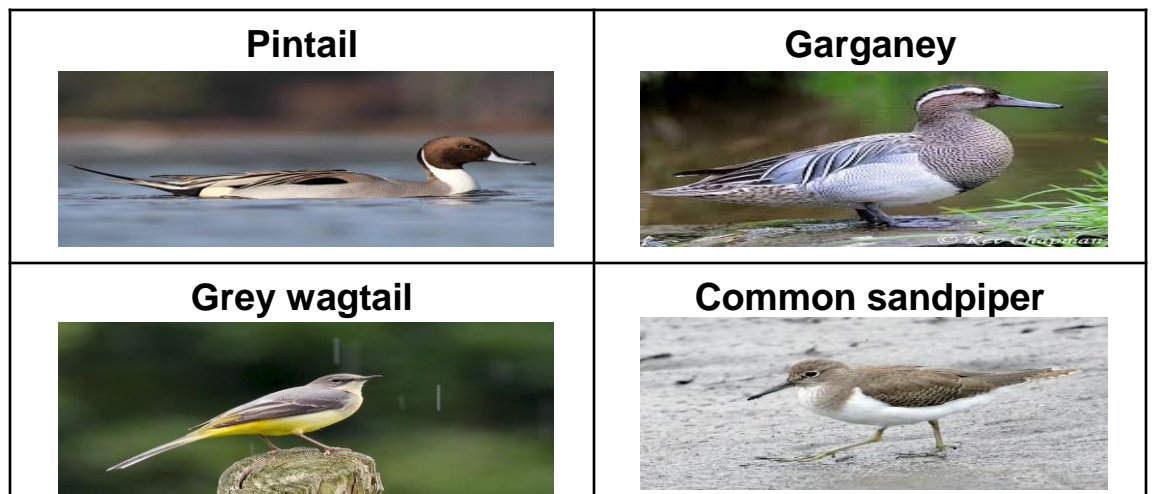
- The treaty **protected it from being attacked or incorporated into the USSR** like the Baltic and eastern European states.
- It allowed the country to pursue the path of democracy and capitalism while staying out of the conflict between the great powers.
- The principle of neutrality was **rooted in the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance** that Finland signed with the USSR in April 1948.

❖ Context

- The Environment Ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee has recommended grant of environment clearance for Sun Pharmaceuticals Industries Ltd.'s expansion project in Tamil Nadu's Madurantakam taluk, around 3.7 km from the Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary.

❖ Key Highlights

- Vedanthangal in Tamil language means '**hamlet of the hunter**'. This area was a favourite hunting spot of the local landlords in the early 18th century.
- The sanctuary is located in Chengalpattu district of Tamil Nadu
- The region attracts a variety of birds because it is **dotted with small lakes** that act as feeding grounds for the birds.
- The **local people have been traditionally active in protecting birds** coming to the area since time immemorial. They knew that the bird droppings in the water created **guano** which acted as fertiliser.
- It is home to migratory birds such as pintail, garganey, grey wagtail, blue-winged teal, common sandpiper and the like.



Tibetan Wolf



❖ Context

- A paper published in **Frontiers**, international ecology journal, has described the Ladakh's community initiative at conservation of Tibetan wolf as success.

❖ Key Highlights

- Of the **32 sub-species of wolves** that are recognised, **two are believed to inhabit Indian subcontinent**.
 - **Tibetan Wolf** - range extends from trans-Himalaya into Tibet and China (500 in no.s - estimated).
 - **Indian Wolf** - ranges over Peninsular India (3000 in numbers).
- The Tibetan wolf is **one of the world's most ancient species**.
- Conservation status:
 - **Critically Endangered**.
 - Protected under **Schedule I** of Wildlife Protection Act.
- Community in order to protect livestock used to create wolf traps, known as **Shandong**. They are inverted funnel shaped stone walls. Once the wolf jumps into the trap, the walls prevent it from escaping. The trapped wolves are then stoned to death. Now, communities committed to stop killing wolves, have been building Stupas next to traditional wolf traps.
- They have also started an **insurance program** to compensate for livestock that are preyed on by wolves.

Tibetan Wolf

Indian Wolf



New buyers of Indian wheat



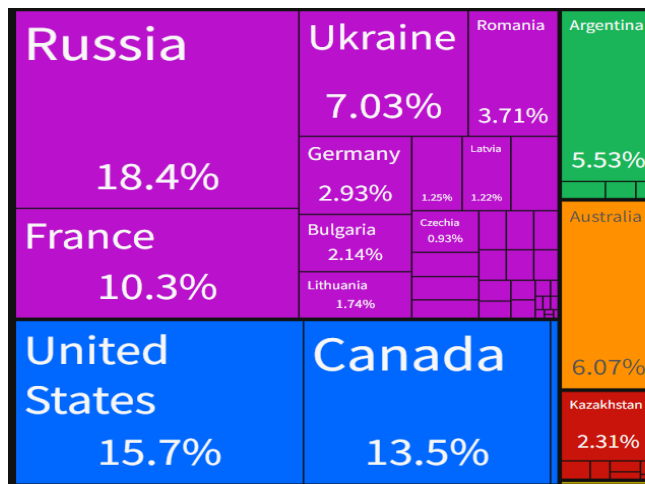
❖ Context

➤ As shipments of all agricultural products from the Black Sea have come to a halt due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, **Thailand and Sudan** have turned out to be the **new buyers** of Indian wheat now, according to APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Foods Products Export Development Authority).

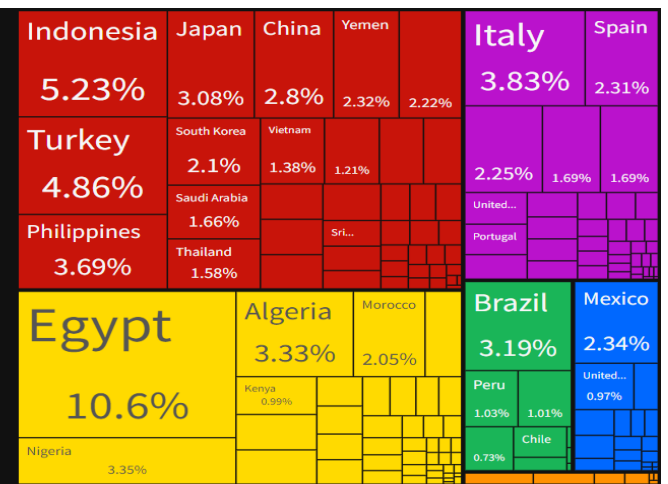
❖ Key Highlights

- **Egypt, Indonesia, Turkey, China, Nigeria, Italy, Algeria, Philippines, Japan, Morocco, Brazil, Bangladesh, Korea, Netherlands and Spain** are the top importers of wheat.
- India already exports to **Bangladesh, Indonesia, Philippines, Nigeria and Japan** other than **UAE, Qatar, Srilanka, Oman & Malaysia**.
- Wheat prices have surged 50% since the beginning of this year. This has turned the focus on Indian wheat, which is traded at a discount to other origin wheat - **Argentine wheat, EU wheat (France), Australian wheat, US hard red winter and soft red winter wheat**.
- APEDA sees Egypt as one country where India has scope to increase its wheat exports as it does not buy any wheat from India. It buys near 70 % of its wheat requirement from Russia and another 20 % from Ukraine.
- APEDA, an arm of the Commerce Ministry, supervises exports of agricultural products, including poultry and meat.

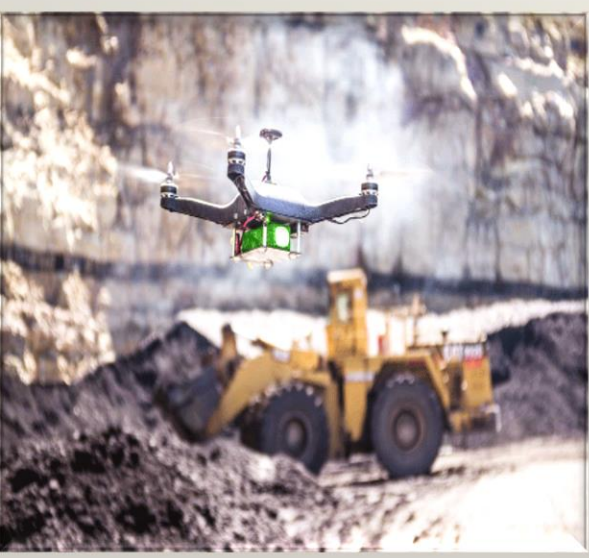
Exporters of wheat



Importers of wheat



Exploration of Minerals Using Drones



❖ Context

➤ The **National Minerals Development Corporation (NMDC)** has signed **memorandum of understanding (MoU)** with **IIT-Kharagpur** for the exploration of minerals **using drones**.

❖ Key Highlights

- NMDC would be the first **Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE)** in India to **conduct drone-based geophysical surveys and hyper-spectral studies** for mineral exploration in the country.
- It will open a new chapter and set a benchmark in the field of **mineral exploration for the nation**.
- NMDC is conducting exploration for various minerals in **Madhya Pradesh and also in the Beloda-Belmundi block in Chhattisgarh for diamonds**.
- Under the pact, **NMDC and IIT-Kharagpur** would develop spectral products, **methods and algorithms for exploration using drones for mining**.
- The collaboration between NMDC and IIT-Kharagpur would further lead to the development of **software spectral tools for mineral excavation and capacity building programmes on mining technology**.
- With the launch of a policy on drones, the government has taken the first step to regulate and monitor drone usage and operations in India which are currently being used in the fields of agriculture, urban planning, forestry, mining, disaster management, surveillance, transport etc.

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