



Negotiations to Revive Black Sea Grain Deal

For Prelims: Negotiations to Revive [Black Sea Grain Deal](#), [United Nations \(UN\)](#), [Food Crises](#), [NATO \(North Atlantic Treaty Organization\)](#).

For Mains: Negotiations to Revive Black Sea Grain Deal.

Source: [TH](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Turkish President has met with the Russian President in order to revive [Black Sea Grain Deal](#), which Russia had withdrawn from in July 2023.



What is the Black Sea Grain Initiative?

▪ **About:**

- The Black Sea Grain initiative **endeavors to tackle escalating food prices emanating from supply chain disruptions** because of Russian actions in the world's 'breadbasket'.
- The deal brokered by the [United Nations \(UN\)](#) and **Turkey**, was signed in Istanbul in July, 2022.
- The Initiative specifically allows for commercial food and fertilizer (including ammonia) exports from three key Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea - **Odesa, Chornomorsk,**

Yuzhny/Pivdennyi.

▪ Objective:

- Initially stipulated for a period of 120 days, the deal was to provide for a **safe maritime humanitarian corridor for Ukrainian exports** (particularly for food grains).
- The central idea was to calm markets by **ensuring an adequate supply of grains**, thereby limiting food price inflation.

▪ Role of Joint Coordination Centre (JCC):

- The JCC was established **to monitor the implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative**.
- The JCC is hosted **in Istanbul and includes representatives from Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine and the UN**. The UN acts also as the Secretariat for the Centre.
- All commercial ships are required to register directly with the JCC to ensure **appropriate monitoring, inspection and safe passage**. Inbound and outbound ships (to the designated corridor) transit as per a schedule accorded by the JCC post-inspection.
 - This is done so as to ensure there is no **unauthorised cargo or personnel onboard**.
 - Following this, they are allowed to **sail onwards to Ukrainian ports** for loading through the designated corridor.

What are the Reasons Behind Russia's Exit from the Grain Deal?

- Russia claims that the **promises made to it under the deal have not been met**, and it is still facing **trouble exporting its own agricultural products** and fertilisers because of the many sanctions the West has slapped on it.
- While there is no direct restriction on Russia's agricultural products, the country says barriers on payment platforms, insurance, shipping and other **logistics are hampering its exports**.
- Russia has also said that it had agreed to the grain deal in order to help ensure global food security, but Ukraine has since exported mainly to **high-and middle-income countries**.
- Russia cited the failure to uphold a parallel agreement that promised to remove obstacles to its exports of food and fertilizer as the reason for its withdrawal.
- Russia claimed that shipping and insurance restrictions hindered its agricultural trade, despite its record-breaking wheat exports in recent years.

What is Turkey's Stake at Brokering the Deal?

- Turkey has played a crucial role in attempting to reinstate the grain deal. It has consistently pledged to **renew arrangements that helped prevent [Food Crises](#)** in various parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.
- Both Ukraine and Russia are **significant suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil**, and other essential goods for developing nations.
- Turkey's close ties with Putin during the 18-month Ukraine conflict have positioned it as a **vital trading partner and logistical hub for Russia's international trade**.
- Despite its **[NATO \(North Atlantic Treaty Organization\)](#)** membership, Turkey has refrained **from imposing Western sanctions on Russia** following its invasion of Ukraine, highlighting its unique diplomatic position.

Why is the Black Sea Grain Initiative Important?

- Ukraine is **among the largest exporters of wheat, maize, rapeseed**, sunflower seeds and sunflower oil, globally.
 - Its access to the deep-sea ports in the Black Sea enables it to **directly approach Russia and Europe along with grain importers** from the Middle East and North Africa.
- The initiative has also been **credited for having made a huge difference to the global cost of living crisis**.
 - This agreement facilitated the safe export of nearly 33 million metric tons (36 million tons) of grain and other commodities **from three Ukrainian ports despite [Russia's Ongoing War](#)**.

- People hoarding the grain in the hope of selling it for a sizable profit owing to the supply crunch were now obligated to sell.
- Although the initiative alone cannot address global hunger, it can avert the **chances of the global food crisis spiralling** further, especially when the region is yet to scale prior year levels.

How are Russia, Ukraine Grain Exports Faring Amid the War?

- **Russia is consolidating its position as the world's top wheat exporter**, even as Ukraine's shipments are projected to more than halve from their peak and production plunge to a 11-year-low.
- The primary destinations for Russian wheat are the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, led by Egypt, Iran and Algeria.
 - While the Black Sea Grain Initiative helped Ukraine export 16.8 million tonnes in 2022-23, about 39% of its wheat actually moved via the land route to Eastern Europe.
- Ukraine's markets have **shifted dramatically from Asia and North Africa before the war to mainly Europe**, mostly due to ease of shipment.
 - In fact, glut of Ukrainian grain has led to protests from farmers in some Eastern European countries, who said the **price of their produce had crashed**.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Q. Consider the following countries: (2023)

1. Bulgaria
2. Czech Republic
3. Hungary
4. Latvia
5. Lithuania
6. Romania

How many of the above-mentioned countries share a land border with Ukraine?

- (a) Only two
- (b) Only three
- (c) Only four
- (d) Only five

Ans: (a)

- **As per the map given below, only Hungary and Romania share their land borders with Ukraine.**



- Hence, option A is correct.

Viability Gap Funding Scheme for Battery Energy Storage Systems

[Source: PIB](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the Union Cabinet has approved the Scheme for **Viability Gap Funding (VGF)** for the development of **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)**, aiming to boost the adoption of renewable energy sources.

- Battery storage, or BESS, are devices that enable energy **from renewables, like solar and wind**, to be stored and then **released when the power is needed most**.

Note: VGF is a financial mechanism used by governments **to bridge the gap between the cost of infrastructure projects and their economic viability**. It is typically employed in projects that are considered **economically unviable or financially unattractive** for private investors due to various reasons, such as high capital costs, low revenue potential, or long gestation periods.

What is the VGF Scheme for Battery Storage?

- **About:**

- The government will provide financial support of up to 40% of the capital cost as budgetary support through Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to substantially reduce the cost of battery

storage systems, making them more economically viable.

- The scheme is strategically designed to harness the potential of renewable energy sources, **such as solar and wind power**, to provide clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to citizens.
- To ensure the benefits of the scheme reach consumers, **a minimum of 85% of the BESS project capacity will be made available to Distribution Companies** (Discoms).
 - This strategic move not only strengthens the integration of renewable energy into the electricity grid but also **minimizes waste and optimizes the utilization of transmission networks**. Consequently, it reduces the need for costly infrastructure upgrades.

▪ **Objective:**

- The primary objective is to facilitate the development of **4,000 megawatt hour (MWh) of BESS projects by 2030-31**.
- **By offering VGF support, the scheme targets achieving a Levelized Cost of Storage (LCoS) ranging from Rs. 5.50-6.60 per kilowatt-hour (kWh)**.

- This cost-effectiveness makes stored renewable energy a practical choice for managing peak power demand nationwide.

▪ **Significance:**

- The Government of India reaffirms its commitment to promoting clean and green energy solutions. The BESS Scheme represents a **significant step towards achieving this vision by harnessing renewable energy** and promoting the adoption of battery storage.
- This initiative aims to create a brighter and greener future for all citizens, aligning with global **sustainability goals**.

Rapid Fire Current Affairs

National Ayush Mission

- Recently, the Regional Review meeting of the **National Ayush Mission (NAM)** was ceremonially inaugurated.
 - At the meeting, following **robust programmes of AYUSH were highlighted:**
 - **Ayurvedya:** Promotion of healthy lifestyle through Ayush **for school children**
 - **Supraja:** Ayush for **Maternal & Neonatal intervention**
 - **Vayomitra:** Ayush based **geriatric programme;** prevention and management of Osteoarthritis and other Musculoskeletal disorders
 - NAM is being implemented with the vision and objectives to provide Ayush health care services throughout the country by strengthening and improving facilities, to provide informed choice to the needy public.
 - Under NAM, the Ministry of Ayush is working on operationalisation of 12,500 **Ayush Health and Wellness Centres (AHWCs)** through support of State/UT Governments by **2023-24**.

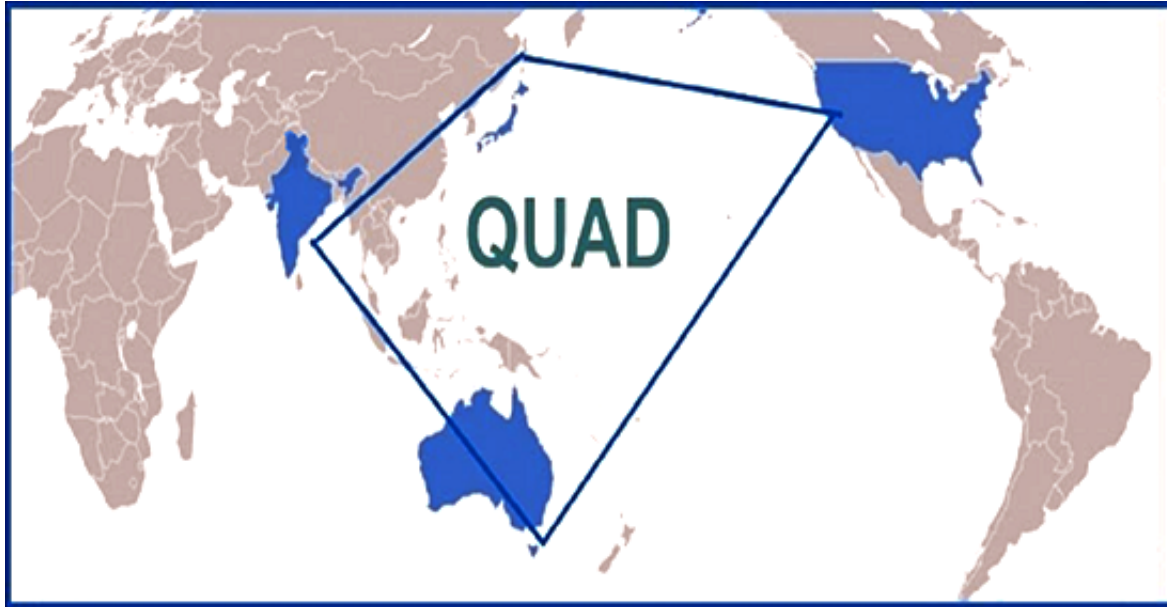
Read More: [National Ayush Mission](#)

Quad Leaders Invited on India's Republic Day

India is discussing the possibility of inviting leaders of the Quad grouping to the **Republic Day parade on**

January 26, 2024.

- January 26 is also observed as **Australia Day** - the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet of 11 convict ships from Great Britain, and the raising of the Union Jack at Sydney Cove by its commander Captain Arthur Phillip, in 1788.
- Quad is the grouping of four democracies - **India, Australia, the US, and Japan** which aims to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region.
- The idea of Quad was **first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, it came into being in 2017.



Read More: [Quad](#)

Sandes App

- **Delhi Police's official communication** on [G20](#) security arrangements will now take place on an **Indian** instant messaging platform, [Sandes](#).
- On this **app Sandes**, users can **only access information** and **cannot forward** it to anyone whose number is **not registered on the app**.
- **Sandes** is a **secure** and **user-friendly messaging platform**. It has been designed to provide a **reliable** and **efficient** means of communication among various **government organizations**.
- The **first version** of the **app** was released by the [National Informatics Centre \(NIC\)](#) in **2020**.
- The **launch of the app** is also a part of the **government's strategy** to **push** for the use of **India-made software** so as to **build an ecosystem** of indigenously developed products.

Read More: [Sandes: Government Instant Messaging System](#)

White Sambar in Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

- The first time a **leucistic sambar** has been observed in the **Sangama range** of [Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary](#).
- A **White Sambar Deer** was previously recorded in [Bandipur Tiger Reserve](#) in **2014**.
- **Leucism** is a condition in which the **pigmentation of an animal's skin is missing, causing white or pale skin**.
 - This condition can occur **naturally** from **birth** due to a **phenotype** (a trait of any living being) that may have formed from a **defect** in the **animal's development**.

- It is different from **albinism** which is a condition that arises due to a **lack of melatonin** in the **animal's skin** and the animal will have **pink or reddish eyes in albinism**.

- The animal **lacks the pink eyes in leucism**.

- **IUCN Status: Vulnerable**



Read More: [Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary](#)

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