

Why is the Kerch Bridge Attack Significant?

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Why in News?

- The Kerch Bridge, which links the Russian mainland to the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea, came under attack last week.

- One section of the bridge was damaged in what the Russians called an attack by two Ukrainian sea drones.

What Happened to the Kerch Bridge?

Image Caption: Kerch Strait

- The Kerch bridge, across the **Kerch Strait**, is 19 km long and has two parallel rail and roadways.
- It was opened in 2018 by Russian President **Vladimir Putin**, four years after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine through a contested referendum.
- Recently, according to Russian authorities, one of the sections of the bridge was blown up killing two people and injuring a child.
- A video footage released by local media showed a portion of the bridge tilted and hanging down.
- This is not the first time the bridge is being targeted. Last October, a massive truck bomb damaged the bridge and killed three people.
- Ukraine hadn't claimed responsibility when the attack took place.
- But Ukraine President **Volodymyr Zelenskyy** later termed the attack on the bridge one of the successful operations of the Ukrainian forces.

Why is Kerch Bridge Important?

- The bridge is important for Russia for symbolic, administrative and operational reasons.
- When Russia swiftly moved to annex Crimea in 2014, there was no direct connectivity between the Russian mainland and Crimea.
- Russia immediately ordered the construction of the bridge.
- But the bridge remained a weak link as Ukraine grew in military strength, backed by the West, in the subsequent years.
- When Russia declared a full-scale war on February 24, 2022 on Ukraine, one of the military objectives, according to experts, was to secure a "land bridge" from mainland Russia to Crimea.
- Russia now has the land bridge extending from north-eastern Ukraine through the Donbas and Kherson to Crimea, but it is not far from the frontline and well within the range of Ukrainian fire.
- So, the **Kerch Bridge remains a critical logistical supply link for the Russian troops in the south.**
- Last year, Ukraine targeted the Kerch Bridge when it was planning an offensive to retake Kherson.
- The plan was to disrupt the supplies when Ukrainians attacked Russian troops on the western bank of the Dnieper River.

Historical Background on Russia-Ukraine Conflict

- Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of cultural, linguistic and familial links.
- As part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia, and was crucial strategically, economically and culturally.
- Ukraine gained independence after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991.
- Since then, both Russia and the West have tried to achieve greater influence in the country in order to keep the balance of power in the region in their favour.
- The Russian government fears that Ukraine's membership of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would complete a western wall of allied countries by restricting Russia's access to the Black Sea.
 - NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance between 28 European countries, US, Canada and Turkey.

Significance of Black Sea for Russia

Image Caption: Black Sea

- The Black Sea sits at an important economic and civilizational crossroads on the Eurasian landmass.
- During the Cold War period, only NATO member **Turkey** served as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union in the Black Sea, which was occasionally referred to at the time as a “**Soviet lake**”.
- Russia depends on the Black Sea for access to the Mediterranean and beyond, both for military operations outside its immediate neighbourhood and for exports of country's main commodity (**hydrocarbons**).
- The Black Sea's proximity to the Russian heartland means that a considerable part of European Russia could be within the range of U.S. sea- and land-based intermediate-range missiles.
- Hence, Russia justifies annexation of **Crimea** (a peninsula along the northern coast of the Black Sea) in 2014 as a necessity to prevent the strategic balance from shifting decisively in NATO's favour.

Russia's Annexation of Crimea in 2014

Image Caption: Russia's Annexation of Crimea

- In November 2013, the then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich announced that he would not proceed with long-anticipated association and trade agreements with the European Union (EU).
- This led to eruption of protests across Ukraine which was followed by the resignation of the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich from the office. He was replaced by a pro-Western interim government.
- This led to pro-Russian separatists seizing government buildings in Crimea.
- Subsequently, Russia intervened through military action and annexed Crimea in March 2014.

- This was the first time a European country annexed territory from another country since World War II.
 - Having built up a large military presence on the border from late 2021, Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine on 24th February 2022, which is ongoing.
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Q1) Where is the Caspian Sea located?

The Caspian Sea is situated about 500 km east of the Black Sea, between south-eastern Europe and Western Asia. It is bordered by five countries: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia.

Q2) Which countries share border with Russia?

Russia borders 14 countries, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, North Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Norway, Poland, and Ukraine.

Source: [Explained | Why is Kerch Bridge attack significant?](#)

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