



Special Issue

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Why Russia and Japan never officially declared peace after WWII

Context: *On September 2, 1945, the allied forces accepted Japan's formal surrender, marking the end of the most destructive global conflict of all time — World War II. But nearly eight decades later, Japan and Russia technically remain at war.*

Details:

- The two countries are yet to formally sign a peace treaty to end World War II hostilities. At the heart of the conflict is a group of tiny islands located just off Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido.
- Now peace talks between the two countries have hit yet another stumbling block — Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- After Japan joined the West in imposing hefty sanctions on Moscow, the Russian foreign ministry announced that it was withdrawing from treaty discussions, accusing Japan of “consciously choosing an anti-Russian course”.
- Moscow further announced that it was halting all joint-economic programs between the two countries.

Why has Moscow halted peace talks?

- After Russia invaded Ukraine, Japan announced that it was revoking ‘most-favoured nation’ (MFN) trade status as part of its economic sanctions against the country.
- MFN status is a key principle of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It ensures non-discriminatory trade between all partner countries of the WTO.
- Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's decision came soon after similar announcements were made by the US, the EU, and the United Kingdom. But since Tokyo and Moscow aren't major trading partners, the move is unlikely to have too much of an adverse impact on Russia, according to a report by Japan Times.
- Kishida further announced that Japan was expanding the scope of asset freezes against Russia and banning the imports of certain products, Reuters reported. Apart from a wide range of luxury products, Japan has banned the export of about 300 semiconductors, computers and communications devices to Russia and Belarus, according to Japan Times.
- Soon after Japan's announcement, Russia asserted that it would not be continuing talks with Japan. “The Russian side, in the current conditions, does not intend to continue talks with Japan on the peace treaty,” the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. It said this was “due to the impossibility of discussing the core document on bilateral relations with a country that has taken an openly hostile position and is striving to cause harm to the interests of our country”.
- Russia called off several joint-economic programs and ended a visa-free regime that allowed Japanese people to visit the disputed Kuril islands that were claimed by the Soviet Union towards the fag end of World War II, AFP reported.

Why haven't Japan and Russia declared peace yet?

- Japan and Russia have had a complicated relationship for over a century. But one of the lowest points in Russia-Japan relations played out during the final days of the Second World War, right before Japan's Emperor Hirohito announced his country's surrender.
- The Soviet Union declared war on Japan and seized a group of islands located near the coast of Hokkaido.
- All 17,000 Japanese residents were expelled at the time. The islands — known as the southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan — are at the centre of an ongoing standoff between the two countries.



- Since then, while Russia insists that the islands fall under its jurisdiction, Japan maintains that they are an inherent part of its territory and are presently under illegal occupation. The territorial dispute has caused deep rifts between the countries and has kept them from finalising a peace agreement.
- After WWII, the Soviet Union refused to sign the formal Treaty of Peace with Japan. Instead, in 1956, the two countries signed a joint declaration “that would technically “end the state of war”. The declaration included an agreement to sign a peace treaty in the future. But this is yet to be achieved.

Why do these islands matter?

- Apart from being home to rich fishing grounds, the islands are significant from a strategic perspective. It is here that a large chunk of Russia’s pacific fleet is docked. In fact, over the last few years, Russia has been increasing its military presence on the islands.
- In 2016, Russian anti-ship and missile defence systems were stationed here, according to a report by ABC. It has also deployed fighter jets to the islands, much to the ire of Japan’s Foreign Affairs ministry.

Have Japan and Russia tried to negotiate?

- Yes, several times. Between 2012 and 2020, leaders of the two countries have held 25 meetings, according to a report by Bloomberg.
- Things were starting to look up for Japan in 2018 when Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japan’s former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe agreed that their negotiations should be based on the joint declaration of 1956, which called for the transfer of two of the four islands to Japan. But Russia said Tokyo would first have to acknowledge its sovereignty over the islands.
- Then in 2020, Russia amended its constitution, making it illegal to hand over any of its territories.

All about the controversy over the proposed Mokedatu water project

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The stage appears set for a summer of discontent yet again, as Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are heading for a political confrontation over the Mokedatu drinking water project across river Cauvery, proposed by the former. Within days of Tamil Nadu Assembly’s resolution against the project, Karnataka’s legislative assembly is set to counter it with a resolution seeking the project’s early implementation and clearances from the Centre.*

What is the project?

- Originally mooted in 1948, Mokedatu (which translates as Goat’s crossing) is a drinking water cum power generation project across river Cauvery.
- Karnataka gave the project shape after the final award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal was notified in February 2013 allocating the riparian states their shares.
- After a pre-feasibility study report was submitted in 2018, the State submitted a detailed project report to the Central Water Commission in 2019. The ₹9,000 crore balancing reservoir at Mokedatu on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border envisages impounding of 67.15 tmc (thousand million cubic) ft. of water.
- The project, which will involve submergence of nearly 5,100 hectares of forest in Cauvery wildlife sanctuary hosting rich flora and fauna, will help the state in utilising the additional 4.75 tmc ft. of water allocated by Supreme Court in 2018 for consumptive use for drinking purpose for Bengaluru and neighbouring areas.
- Karnataka’s share in the award has been decided at 284.75 tmc ft. In July 2019, the Expert Appraisal Committee on River Valley and Hydroelectric Projects constituted by the Union Ministry of



Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has said the proposal could be reconsidered only after Tamil Nadu and Karnataka reach an “amicable solution.”

How will it benefit Karnataka?

- The water from Makedatu is to be pumped to quench the thirst of the burgeoning population of Bengaluru which is estimated to be around 1.3 crore.
- Currently, more than 30% of Bengaluru is dependent on borewell water. Ramanagara and Bengaluru rural districts will also benefit. Along with the 5th stage of the Cauvery Water Supply Scheme, which will be completed shortly, the water from Makedatu is projected to meet the water requirement of the State capital for the next 30 years.
- Besides, there are also plans to generate 400 MW of power. The revenue earned from power generation is expected to compensate the Government its investment on the project within a few years.
- Karnataka argues that the reservoir will also help to ensure monthly flow stipulated in the award for Tamil Nadu rather than harm the neighbouring State's interest in any way.

What is the current status?

- The project is now before the Cauvery Water Management Authority. The Authority is exploring the possibility of having an exclusive discussion on the project, when the matter is sub judice.
- Apart from writing to the Centre to withdraw the permission given to prepare the detailed project report (DPR), Tamil Nadu has also filed a petition before the Supreme Court, explaining its objections against the project. The Centre and Karnataka have also filed counter affidavits.

What is Karnataka's stand?

- Karnataka says that there is no case for Tamil Nadu after its share of 177.75 tmc ft. of water is ensured at the inter-State border gauging centre at Biligundlu. Also, the project falls inside the jurisdictional limit of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu's permission is not needed.
- The State also argues that since there is no stay in any court for the project, Karnataka can go ahead. On utilising the surplus water, Karnataka says that any allocation in this sphere should be done after hydrology studies to ascertain the quantum of excess water available in the basin.

Why is Tamil Nadu opposed to it?

- Tamil Nadu feels that Karnataka, through the project, will impound and divert flows from “uncontrolled catchments” to it, a component which was taken into account by the Tribunal in the 2007 order while arriving at the water allocation plan for the State.
- As per an estimate, around 80 tmc ft of water flows annually to Tamil Nadu, thanks to the catchments including the area between Kabini dam in Karnataka and Billigundulu gauging site on the inter-State border, and the area between Krishnaraja Sagar dam in Karnataka and the gauging site.
- As the upper riparian State has adequate infrastructure even now to address the water needs of Bengaluru, there is no need for the Makedatu project, according to Tamil Nadu. Makedatu also does not find mention in the Tribunal's final order or the Supreme Court judgement.
- Besides, given the unpleasant experiences that it has had with Karnataka in securing its share of the Cauvery water, as per the monthly schedule of water release, Tamil Nadu is wary of assurances from the other side.

Is Karnataka ready for negotiation?

- No. A recent suggestion by the Union Water Resources Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat for a negotiated settlement raised a storm in Karnataka's political circles and the State Water Resources Minister Govind Karjol met him to reiterate the State's stand.



- Karnataka has said that there is no scope for negotiation in any interstate river water sharing issue where the tribunal award has been concluded and Karnataka's right on water has been established after the award has been gazetted.

All about the complexities of introducing African cheetahs to India

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The cheetah, which became extinct in India after Independence, is all set to return with the Union Government launching an action plan. According to the plan, about 50 of these big cats will be introduced in the next five years, from the Africa savannas, home to cheetahs, an endangered species.*

What was the distribution of cheetahs in India? What were the habitats?

- Historically, Asiatic cheetahs had a very wide distribution in India. There are authentic reports of their occurrence from as far north as Punjab to Tirunelveli district in southern Tamil Nadu, from Gujarat and Rajasthan in the west to Bengal in the east.
- Most of the records are from a belt extending from Gujarat passing through Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha.
- There is also a cluster of reports from southern Maharashtra extending to parts of Karnataka, Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The distribution range of the cheetah was wide and spread all over the subcontinent. They occurred in substantial numbers.
- The cheetah's habitat was also diverse, favouring the more open habitats: scrub forests, dry grasslands, savannas and other arid and semi-arid open habitats.
- Some of the last reports of cheetahs in India prior to their local extinction are from edge habitats of sal forests in east-central India, not necessarily their preferred habitat.
- In Iran, the last surviving population of wild Asiatic cheetahs are found in hilly terrain, foothills and rocky valleys within a desert ecosystem, spread across seven provinces of Yazd, Semnan, Esfahan, North Khorasan, South Khorasan, Khorasan Razavi and Kerman.
- The current estimate of the population of wild Asiatic cheetahs is about 40 with 12 identified adult animals. They occur in very low density spread over vast areas extending to thousands of square kilometres.

What caused the extinction of cheetahs in India? When did they disappear?

- The cheetah in India has been recorded in history from before the Common Era. It was taken from the wild for coursing blackbuck for centuries, which is a major contributor to the depletion of its numbers through the ages. Records of cheetahs being captured go back to 1550s.
- From the 16th century onwards, detailed accounts of its interaction with human beings are available as it was recorded by the Mughals and other kingdoms in the Deccan. However, the final phase of its extinction coincided with British colonial rule. The British added to the woes of the species by declaring a bounty for killing it in 1871.
- The consistent and widespread capture of cheetahs from the wild (both male and female) over centuries, its reduced levels of genetic heterogeneity due to a historical genetic bottleneck resulting in reduced fecundity and high infant mortality in the wild, its inability to breed in captivity, 'sport' hunting and finally the bounty killings are the major reasons for the extinction of the Asiatic cheetah in India.
- It is reported that the Mughal Emperor Akbar had kept 1,000 cheetahs in his menagerie and collected as many as 9,000 cats during his half century reign from 1556 to 1605. As late as 1799, Tipu Sultan of Mysore is reported to have had 16 cheetahs as part of his menagerie.



- The cheetah numbers were fast depleting by the end of the 18th century even though their prey base and habitat survived till much later. It is recorded that the last cheetahs were shot in India in 1947, but there are credible reports of sightings of the cat till about 1967.

What are the conservation objectives of introducing African cheetahs in India? Is it a priority for India? Is it cost effective?

- Based on the available evidence it is difficult to conclude that the decision to introduce the African cheetah in India is based on science.
- Science is being used as a legitimising tool for what seems to be a politically influenced conservation goal. This also in turn sidelines conservation priorities, an order of the Supreme Court, socio-economic constraints and academic rigour. The issue calls for an open and informed debate.
- Eminent biologist and administrator T.N. Khoshoo, first secretary of the Department of Environment, spoke out strongly against the cheetah project in 1995.
- “The reintroduction project was discussed threadbare during Indira Gandhi's tenure and found to be an exercise in futility,” he said, pointing out that it was more important to conserve species that were still extant such as the lion and tiger, rather than trying to re-establish an extinct species that had little chance of surviving in a greatly transformed country.
- Mr. Khoshoo's views are in sync with the 2013 order of the Supreme Court which quashed plans to introduce African cheetahs in India and more specifically at Kuno national park in Madhya Pradesh.
- The officially stated goal is: Establish viable cheetah metapopulation in India that allows the cheetah to perform its functional role as a top predator and to provide space for the expansion of the cheetah within its historical range thereby contributing to its global conservation efforts.
- African cheetahs are not required to perform the role of the top predator in these habitats when the site (Kuno) that they have identified already has a resident population of leopards, transient tigers and is also the site for the translocation of Asiatic lions as ordered by the Supreme Court of India in 2013. In other open dry habitats in India there are species performing this role, e.g., wolf and caracal, both of which are highly endangered and need urgent conservation attention.
- Even the Government's official estimate is expecting, at best only a few dozen cheetahs at a couple of sites (that too only after 15 years) which will require continuous and intensive management. Such a small number of cats at very few sites cannot meet the stated goal of performing its ecological function at any significant scale to have real on ground impact.
- Clearly, there are far more cost-effective, efficient, speedier and more inclusive ways to conserve grasslands and other open ecosystems of India.
- Apart from establishing a cheetah population in India, the stated objectives include: To use the cheetah as a charismatic flagship and umbrella species to garner resources for restoring open forest and savanna systems that will benefit biodiversity and ecosystem services from these ecosystems.
- Asiatic lions and a variety of species already found in these ecosystems can very well perform this role and more. If the government is serious about restoration and protection of these habitats, it first needs to remove grasslands from the category of wastelands and prevent further degradation, fragmentation and destruction of these habitats.
- Investing directly in science-based restoration and inclusive protection of these ecosystems will yield results much more quickly and sustainably than the introduction of African cheetahs.
- Another goal is to enhance India's capacity to sequester carbon through ecosystem restoration activities in cheetah conservation areas and thereby contribute towards the global climate change mitigation goals.
- Experts contend that this objective does not require the introduction of African cheetahs, at a cost of ₹40 crore, with the attendant risks of diseases which haven't really been dealt with.

What is the current status of this project? What are the chances of it succeeding?

- According to the Government, Kuno is ready to receive the cheetahs. About a month ago a team of government officials visited Namibia to inspect the cheetahs that would be sent to India, review the



arrangements and to reach an agreement for the transfer of the cats. It is being reported that Namibia wants India's support for lifting the CITES ban on commercial trade of wildlife products, including ivory.

- The draft memorandum of understanding shared by Namibia reportedly contains a condition requiring India to support Namibia for “sustainable utilisation of wildlife”. Negotiations are currently underway to finalise the MoU and it is expected to be signed by the end of March.
- The cheetahs are to be provided by the Cheetah Conservation Fund, an NGO, and not the Namibian government.
- Three to five cheetahs are expected to be part of the first group of cats and these are expected to arrive as early as May 2022 and released in the wild by August 15.
- Given all the challenges, especially the lack of extensive areas extending in hundreds if not thousands of square kilometres with sufficient density of suitable prey, it is very unlikely that African cheetahs would ever establish themselves in India as a truly wild and self-perpetuating population.
- A likely unfortunate consequence of this initiative will be the diversion of scarce conservation resources, distraction from the real conservation priorities and a further delay in the translocation of lions to Kuno.