**Russia-Ukraine Grain Export Deal**

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Last Friday, Russia signed an agreement with Ukraine to allow the latter to export food grains through the Ukrainian Black Sea ports amid fears of a global food crisis. The deal is the outcome of the UN diplomacy supported by Turkey. The deal, signed in Istanbul (Turkey), shows that something good would come out if adequately bridged even between the two warring countries. The deal is being considered a significant breakthrough that would help normalize the situation between both countries.

Russia and Ukraine are among the world’s biggest exporters of food, but the war between them has led to a de-facto blockade of the Black Sea, resulting in Ukraine’s exports dropping to a sixth of their pre-war level. Both countries export 23 per cent of the world’s cereal foods. A good gesture of Russia to ease the world’s food crisis. The UN, US and NATO countries shall consider easing sanctions on Russia to export its food grains. It would further ease the food crisis that is looming large.

Russian defence minister Sergei Shoigu and Ukraine’s infrastructure minister, Oleksandr Kubrakov, signed the deal separately on Friday, carefully avoiding sitting at the same table and avoiding shaking hands. The accord signing ceremony took place at Istanbul’s lavish Dolmabahce Palace in the presence of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Both leaders hoped that the agreement would be a beacon of hope on the Black Sea and a relief in a world that needed it more than ever. Guterres called on Russia and Ukraine to fully implement the accord. The agreement is valid for 120 days and may be automatically renewed without further negotiations.

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that Friday’s deal means around $10bn worth of grain will be available for sale with roughly 20 million tonnes of last year’s harvest that can now be exported.

According to UN officials, under the agreement, a coalition of Turkish, Ukrainian and UN staff will monitor the loading of grain into vessels in Ukrainian ports before navigating a preplanned route through the Black Sea, which remains heavily mined by Ukrainian and Russian forces. Ukrainian pilot vessels will guide commercial vessels transporting the grain to navigate the mined areas around the coastline using a map of safe channels provided by the Ukrainian side. The vessels will then cross the Black Sea towards Turkey’s Bosphorus Strait while being closely monitored by a joint coordination centre in Istanbul, containing representatives from the UN, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.

Russia is concerned that weapons might be brought via ships to Ukraine and Ukraine is concerned about the safety of its grain deliveries to world markets. Accordingly, ships entering Ukraine will be inspected under the supervision of the same joint coordination centre to ensure they are not carrying weapons. The Russian and Ukrainian sides will also withhold attacks on any of the commercial vessels or ports engaged in the initiative to transport vital grain, while UN and Turkish monitors will be present in Ukrainian ports to demarcate areas protected by the agreement.

The Black Sea ports blockade has worsened global supply chain disruptions and along with Western sanctions imposed on Moscow, stoked inflation in food prices since the Russian-Ukraine war erupted on February 24 this year.

The agreement shall be the first step towards resolving the issues between the two warring countries besides solving the food crisis. It may be hoped that the agreement will also pave the way for Russian food and fertilisers to reach world markets as well that Moscow is struggling with exports as a result of the Western sanctions.

The United States has welcomed the deal but warned that it would hold Russia accountable for implementing it. In my opinion, the US shall hold itself responsible and accountable for this accord and the entire peace between both countries. The US and the NATO countries shall stop supplying military aid of all sorts to Ukraine. Let the UN and the sane countries intervene between Russia and Ukraine for a peace deal.

While the deal should be looked at with cautious optimism, it would be a test of how the shipping market would react to it. Strict safeguards and implementation of the accord in the coming weeks will define the fate of the accord. The assures of the accord have to vigilantly mark not only the implementation, but any undue fiddling by any external elements to make an excuse for “collective defence.”

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