## 20th January 2020

**General Studies-2**

### India-Pak. trade freeze hits thousands: report

**Why in news?**
- A report highlighting the effect of India-Pakistan ties on the lives of the people in the bordering regions.

**Background:**
- Following the Pulwama attack, India imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan which curbed the bilateral trade between the two neighbouring countries.
- There has been the shutdown of trade between India and Pakistan across the Wagah-Attari border and the Line of Control (LoC) Salamabad-Chakhan da Bagh routes.
- The cancellation of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to Pakistan and the trade routes' closure, was followed by Pakistan's counter-measures, including an airspace ban and suspension of trade relations.

**Key points:**
- According to the report titled "Unilateral decisions, bilateral losses" authored by researchers at the Bureau of Research on Industry and Economic Fundamentals (BRIEF), the measures and countermeasures have led to a decline in the relatively meagre bilateral trade of $2.56 billion in 2018-19 dropping to $547.22 million (April-August 2019).
- It has resulted in losses in billions of dollars and hundreds of job days affecting the livelihood opportunities of the locals.
- Many families and roughly 50,000 people, in Punjab and nearly 900 families in Kashmir have been directly affected by the shutdown of trade between India and Pakistan.
- The affected groups comprise of traders, custom house agents, truck drivers and helpers, those working at tyre and mechanic stores, local dhabas and motels, who are more vulnerable to economic hardships and poverty.

**Government's arguments:**
- Government officials justify the decisions on trade as being meant to be a tough message for Pakistan and to show India's frustration over Pakistan's continued support to terrorism.
- The economic sanctions would affect Pakistan's economy even more than India's.
- The Union Home Ministry has argued that trade needs to be stopped until a stricter regulatory regime is in place to block the misuse of the route for smuggling weapons, narcotics and fake currency. The ministry has stated in the suspension order that trade would be resumed at a later date considering any change in prevailing circumstances.

## Centre for tougher law against sexual harassment at work

**Why in news?**

- Recommendations to strengthen laws against sexual harassment at workplace.

**Existing laws:**

- The Women and Child Development Ministry had steered the Sexual Harassment of Women and Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act in 2013. This act is applicable to government offices, the private sector, NGOs and even the unorganized sector.
- This act was largely based on the Vishaka Guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court in 1997.
- The act made the employer responsible to prevent or deter acts of sexual harassment at the workplace. The Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) would be constituted to enquire into complaints regarding sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The Act required the employer to provide requisite assistance to a woman if she chooses to file a complaint under the IPC against the perpetrator, after the conclusion of the enquiry.

**Concerns:**

- The 2013 Act had entrusted the powers of a civil court to the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) without specifying if the members need to have a legal background. This was a major lacuna given that the ICC formed an important grievance redressal mechanism under the framework of the act.
- The 2013 act only imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on employers for non-compliance with respect to the constitution of the ICC. This proved to be insufficient in ensuring that the employers constituted the ICC in a time-bound manner.

**NCRB data:**

- As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the number of sexual harassment incidents at "work or office premises" registered under Section 509 IPC (words, gesture or act to insult the modesty of a woman) were 479 and 401 in the years 2017 and 2018 respectively.
- The total number of sexual harassment incidents in 2018 including that in public places, shelter homes and others was 20,962. The number of cases continued to be high questioning the effectiveness of the 2013 act.

**The Group of Ministers:**

- The Group of Ministers (GoM) was constituted in October 2018 in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, which witnessed many women sharing their ordeal of sexual harassment on social media.
- The GoM was constituted to strengthen the legal framework to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace.
- The GoM was reconstituted in July 2019 under the Home Minister. The other members of the

GoM include the Finance Minister, Human Resource Development Minister and Women and Child Development Minister.

## PF benefits should extend to contractual employees: SC

- A petition was filed by M/s Pawan Hans Limited.
- The company had implemented the PF Trust Regulations only with respect to the regular employees, even though the term "employee" had been defined to include "any person" employed "directly or indirectly" under the PF Trust Regulations.
- The contractual employees have been seeking parity with the regular employees, who are covered under the Pawan Hans Employees Provident Fund Trust Regulations.
- The company had filed the petition against its employees' union, which sought uniformity in the service conditions among employees.

## Details:

- The Supreme Court has held in the judgment that the benefits of the provident fund should also be extended to contractual employees.
- The SC has held that such employees who draw wages or salaries directly or indirectly from a company are entitled to provident fund benefits under the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) Act.

## Significance:

- The judgment would have a significant bearing on a large number of contractual employees in other companies as well.
- Though it would be beneficial to the contractual employees, it would add to the financial burden of the company.

## General studies-3

## Regulator flags 49 drug samples as 'not of standard quality
### Why in news?

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization's (CDSCO), December 2019 list of drugs declared not of standard quality.

### Key points:

- The Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO), in its December 2019 list of drugs/medical devices and cosmetics declared not of standard quality/spurious/adulterated/misbranded, has flagged 49 samples, as "not of standard quality".
- Of the 1,336 samples tested, 1,286 were declared of standard quality, 49 "not of standard quality'' and one
- The drugs "failed" the quality test because of the presence of foreign matter, description,

particulate matter, extractable volume, sterility, disintegration, dissolution and other parameters.

- Such defects may arise because of inadequate pre-formulation development studies, lack of in-process controls exercised by the manufacturer or unsuitable conditions under which drugs are stored or transported.
- Spurious or imitation drug products are formulations manufactured concealing the true identity of the product and made to resemble another popular brand drug, to deceive the buyer. The product may or may not contain active ingredients.

## Concerns:
- Health risks associated with the consumption of these 'not of standard quality' drugs.
- Impacts the Indian brand of pharma products in other countries.

## Green nod for oil, gas exploration waived

## Why in news?
- The Environment Ministry's notification granting exemption to oil and gas firms involved in exploratory drilling, from seeking environmental clearance.

## Background:
- Previously, even exploratory surveys required the highest level of environmental scrutiny and were classified under category 'A' projects.
- Category 'A' projects required project proponents to prepare an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) plan.
- The EIA would be scrutinized by a centrally constituted committee of experts.
- The project would also be subject to a public hearing involving the locals of the proposed project site. Public hearings, for category 'A' projects, are generally exempted if they are offshore projects.

## Key points:
- The new exemption of environmental clearance is valid only for drilling explorations of both on-shore and offshore projects.
- Developing an offshore or onshore drilling site as a hydrocarbon block will still continue to merit a "category A" classification.
- The new amendments demote exploratory projects to the category of 'B2' projects, which implies that the project appraisal would be conducted by the States concerned and will not require an EIA.
- The move is part of a larger process of decentralization by the Centre, which is seeking the devolution of more regulatory actions to State and local units.

**Concerns:**
- Since the exploratory drilling process is an ecologically-intensive exercise that involves digging multiple wells and conducting seismic surveys offshore, environmentalists fear that the exemption could lead to lax oversight over such projects.
- Environmentalists note with concern that this move is part of a continuing trend of the larger lack of oversight by the Environment Ministry and making the projects more business-friendly by focusing on ease of doing business.

**Tamil Nadu and Puducherry experience:**
- In 2019, ONGC and the Vedanta group were granted permission to conduct exploratory oil surveys in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry.
- Amid fears that the exploratory drilling would lead to the destruction of agricultural fields in the Cauvery delta, there were protests in the region.
- There are also arguments by environmentalists that offshore drilling operations can lead to a build-up of heavy water contaminants and possibly affect fish and other sea life that rely on sonar for navigation.
- There are fears that the exploratory drilling in offshore areas can increase the risk of oil spills and severely impact the coastal ecology.

## M.P. focuses on reviving threatened tree species
**Why in news?**
- Madhya Pradesh Government's Afforestation policy.

**Background:**
- With around 25% area under forests, Madhya Pradesh, according to the India State of Forest Report, 2019, has the largest forest cover in the country.
- Notably, 32 out of the total 216 naturally occurring tree species in the State face the threat of extinction.

**Key points:**
- In a notable shift from the British-era focus on high-value timber to indigenous species having traditional value, the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department in 2019 planted 70 lakh saplings of such threatened indigenous tree species.
- The threatened species were identified based on extensive research. A species was deemed threatened based on both the present threat and future threat perception to it.
- The threatened species identified included:
- Bija: Has high timber and fodder value and is used to cure diabetes and make concussion equipment.
- Tinsa: used to improve fertility in women.
- Salai: Used in producing resin and gum.

- Dahiman: used to cure high blood pressure.
- The afforestation approach was based on the principle that there is a need to find solutions to the problem of threatened species based on local situations.
- Madhya Pradesh state plans to have at least 10% of all plantations in the State planted with endangered indigenous species.

## Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine
## Why in news?
- The government is planning for the nationwide rollout of Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) under Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

## Key points:
- According to government estimates, a countrywide rollout of PCV would require about 50% of the budget of UIP (minus shared costs such as staff salary, establishment costs, etc).
- PCV is the costliest vaccine in the UIP basket that currently covers only about 50% of the 26 million birth cohort in Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan.
- PCV was first brought into the UIP basket in 2017 but cost concerns have been among the reasons for its still-partial rollout.
- The cost challenge for India's immunisation programme is set to mount further as Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) is set to withdraw its support for India from 2022.
- GAVI is an international organisation which brings together public and private sectors to create equal access to vaccines for children.

## Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine
- Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV) prevents pneumococcal disease.
- The vaccine is a mix of several bacteria of the pneumococci family, which are known to cause pneumonia — hence 'conjugate' is included in the name of the vaccine.
- Conjugate vaccines are made using a combination of two different components.

## Pneumococcal Disease
- Pneumococcal disease refers to any illness caused by pneumococcal bacteria.
- Symptoms: These bacteria can cause many types of illnesses, including pneumonia, which is an infection of the lungs. Pneumococcal bacteria are one of the most common causes of pneumonia.
- Vulnerable Population: Anyone can get pneumococcal disease, but children under 2 years of age, people with certain medical conditions, adults 65 years or older, and cigarette smokers are at the highest risk.

## Status in India:
- In 2010, the annual incidence of severe pneumococcal pneumonia in India was estimated to be 4.8 episodes per 1,000 children younger than 5 years.
- The top five contributors to India's pneumococcal pneumonia burden in terms of the number of cases and deaths were Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jharkhand.

## Block chain technology
### Why in news?
- Recently, the Union Government has launched the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Blockchain Technology in Bengaluru.
- The CoE will provide world-class blockchain services to the government by identifying and sharing suitable data for the use of government departments.

## Key Points:
- Centre of Excellence in Blockchain Technology has been set up by the National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- Set up in 1976, National Informatics Centre (NIC) is a premier technology advisor and ICT solution provider to Government at all levels through its ICT Network, NICNET. It plays a crucial role in the development of critical e-Governance solutions and a host of other services required by the Government.
- Objective: To provide Blockchain as a Service (BaaS) for efficient hosting of Blockchain network and allowing all stakeholders to benefit from shared learning, experiences and resources.
- Blockchain-as-a-Service (BaaS) is a third-party cloud-based infrastructure and management for companies building and operating blockchain apps.
- Proof of Concepts: The CoE will facilitate the Government Departments in building proof of concepts for use of Blockchain technology in different dimensions of governance.
- Enhanced Transparency: Applications of Blockchain in the Government are expected to enhance transparency, traceability and trust in e-governance systems.
- Centre of Excellence in Blockchain Technology is the third such centre, following the Centre of Excellence for Data Analytics (CEDA), New Delhi and Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence (CoE in AI).

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## Irrawaddy dolphins
### Why in news?
- During the Dolphin Census in Chilikalake, direct sighting of 146 Irrawaddy dolphins has been reported.
- The Census is being carried out using Hydrophone monitoring technique. A hydrophone is a

microphone designed to be used underwater for recording or listening to underwater sound.

## Irrawaddy dolphins
- Irrawaddy dolphins (Orcaellabrevirostris) are found in coastal areas in South and Southeast Asia, and in three rivers: the Irrawaddy (Myanmar), the Mahakam (Indonesian Borneo) and the Mekong (China).
- They are listed as 'Critically Endangered' as per the IUCN Red List.
- The total population of these aquatic mammals in the world is estimated to be less than 7,500.
- More than 6,000 Irrawaddy dolphins have been reported from Bangladesh.
- Dolphin distribution in Chilika is considered to be the highest single lagoon population.

## Chilika Lake
- Chilika is Asia's largest and world's second-largest lagoon.
- It lies on the east coast of India in the state of Odisha, separated from the mighty Bay of Bengal by a small strip of sand.
- It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent and is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals.
- In 1981, Chilika Lake was designated the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.
- The major attraction at Chilika is Irrawady dolphins which are often spotted off Satpada Island.
- The large Nalabana Island (Forest of Reeds) covering about 16 sq km in the lagoon area was declared a bird sanctuary in 1987.
- Kalijai Temple is located on an island in the Chilika Lake.

## K-4 ballistic missile
## Why in news?
- Recently, India successfully test-fired the 3,500-km range submarine-launched ballistic missile K-4.

## Key points:
- The test was carried out by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) from a submerged pontoon (a flattish boat that relies on floats to remain buoyant) off the Visakhapatnam coast (Andhra Pradesh).
- A pontoon simulates the situation of a launch from a submarine.
- The Circular Error Probability (CEP) of the missile is much more sophisticated than Chinese missiles.
- The CEP determines the accuracy of a missile. The lower the CEP, the more accurate the

missile is.
- After induction, these will be the chief support of the Arihant class of indigenous Ballistic Missile Nuclear Submarines (SSBN). It will give India the standoff capability to launch nuclear weapons submerged in Indian waters.
- INS Arihant, the first and only operational SSBN, is armed with K-15 Sagarika missiles with a range of 750 km.
- It means that the submarine has to move closer to the adversary's coast to launch the missile but the K-4 will be able to overcome that because of its range coverage.

## GeMSamvaad
- Public procurement platform 'Government e-Marketplace (GeM)' has launched a national outreach program called GeMSamvaad to attract sellers to sell products online to government buyers.
- The government is trying to reach out to stakeholders across the country and also local sellers in order to facilitate the on-boarding of local sellers on the marketplace while catering to specific requirements and procurement needs of buyers.
- Under the 'Voice of Customer' initiative, the GeM is also looking forward to receiving feedback from users which will be used for making improvements and advancements in the system.

## Government e-Marketplace (GeM)
- GeM is a one-stop National Public Procurement Portal to facilitate online procurement of common use Goods & Services required by various Central and State Government Departments / Organizations /Public Sector Undertakings ( PSUs).
- It was launched in 2016 to bring transparency and efficiency in the government buying process.
- It operates under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- The procurement of goods and services by Ministries and the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) is mandatory for goods and services available on GeM.
- It also provides the tools of e-bidding and reverse e-auction to facilitate the government users achieve the best value for their money.
- At present, GeM has more than 15 lakh products, around 20,000 services, and more than 40,000 Government buyer organizations.

## Lone, rare migratory eagle sighted in Andhra Pradesh
- A lone endangered steppe eagle (Aquila nipalensis) has been sighted near Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, during the 'Asian Waterbird Census'.
- The 'Asian Waterbird Census' is a citizen science programme.
- Steppe eagle is believed to be the second-largest migratory eagle species to India. In winter, steppe eagle breeds in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia.

- Researchers have created an embryo of the northern white rhino by using In vitro Fertilization (IVF) process.
- Presently, there are only two northern white rhinos in the world.

**White Rhino**
- White rhinos are the second largest land mammal after the elephant.
- White rhinos are also known as the square-lipped rhinoceros due to their square (not pointed) upper lip.
- Two genetically different subspecies exist, the northern and southern white rhino and are found in two different regions in Africa.
- The IUCN Status of White Rhino is Near Threatened. The IUCN status of its subspecies is as follows:
  - Northern White Rhino: Critically Endangered
  - Southern White Rhino: Near Threatened
- There is also the black (or hook-lipped) rhinoceros in Africa, which too, is fighting for survival, and at least three of whose subspecies are already extinct. It is critically endangered in the IUCN Red list.
- The Indian rhinoceros is different from its African cousins, most prominently in that it has only one horn. It is vulnerable in the IUCN Red list.
- There is also a Javan rhino, which too, has one horn, and a Sumatran rhino which, like the African rhinos, has two horns. Both Javan and Sumatran Rhino are critically endangered in the IUCN Red list.