Prime Minister Narendra Modi – flagged off the Tejas Express through videoconferencing in Kanyakumari on March 1, 2019

Tamil Nadu CM Edappadi K Palaniswami and Governor Banwarilal Purohit were present on the occasion

During the occasion, the Prime Minister unveiled several projects for the state worth more than Rs 2,000 crore
Chennai’s 14-year old ‘Mohamed Mikail’ – to race for Honda in the upcoming Thai Talent Cup (NSF250R)

- With the selection, he becomes the youngest Indian to compete in an international bike-racing event
- Japanese automobile giant Honda has a comprehensive programme for the junior riders and Mikail, who along with Kritik Habib, was selected during the talent hunt for the international events

**NATIONAL**

- The Government – announces subsidy benefit details for electric vehicles under FAME II scheme

**POWER DRIVE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of vehicle</th>
<th>Number to get subsidy</th>
<th>Amount of subsidy (in ₹)</th>
<th>Max vehicle price (in ₹)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-wheeler</td>
<td>10 lakh</td>
<td>20,000-40,000</td>
<td>1.5 lakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-wheeler</td>
<td>5 lakh</td>
<td>50,000-1 lakh</td>
<td>5 lakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-car cab</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>1.5-2.5 lakh</td>
<td>15 lakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid car</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>5,000-20,000</td>
<td>15 lakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-bus</td>
<td>7,090</td>
<td>Rs 35-60 lakh</td>
<td>2 crore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a transformational scheme to push mobility for the masses. It draws from the PM’s vision at the Mobility Summit where he laid down the principles through 7Cs — Common, Connected, Convenient, Congestion-free, Charged, Clean and Cutting-edge

—AMITABH KANU | CED NITI AAYOG
It had allocated a total of Rs 10,000 crore for subsidies with around Rs 8.596 crore (roughly 80%) to be used exclusively as subsidy to push electric vehicles and the balance amount of Rs 1,300 crore set aside for the charging stations.

Subsidy details for Electric vehicles

- The biggest chunk of subsidy of Rs 3,545 crore has been earmarked for running of 7,090 electric buses by government transport understandings.
- Shared transport including three-wheelers are allocated Rs 2,500 crore subsidy.
- For 10 lakh two-wheelers, the total subsidy has been fixed at Rs 2,000 crore.
- Another Rs 525 crore has been kept for four-wheelers “mainly” for cabs, excluding Private electric four-wheelers.
- Rs 26 crore subsidy has been allocated for hybrid cars to pacify the Japanese automobile manufacturers, who have been opposing sops for electric vehicles.

Charging station details

- Around nine cities with more than four million population each will get 1,000 charging stations.
- Another 44 million-plus cities will get 1,000 and the smart and hilly cities would get another 500 charging stations.
- Another 200 charging stations would be set up along the major roads connecting two cities such as Delhi-Gurgaon, Hyderabad-Secunderabad and Mumbai-Navi Mumbai.

The Government - has inaugurated the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

- Bihar BJP leader Bhagwan Lal Sahni has been named the chairman of the NCBC.
- Kaushalendra Singh Patel (UP), Sudha Yadav (MP) and Achary Talloju (Telangana), all linked to the BJP, would be the members of the commission.
- The Constitution (123rd Amendment) Bill to grant the commission ‘constitutional status’ was introduced in Parliament in April 2017 and approved in August 2018 – after repealing the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993.
- The new commission is enshrined in the Constitution at par with the panels for SCs and STs, with power to hear grievances.
- The earlier commission had a limited mandate of inclusion and exclusion of castes in the national list of OBCs.
- The term of the last NCBC chairperson, Justice V Eswaraiah (retd) got over in September 2016, while that of its last member expired by February 2017.
The central government’s Ayushman Bharat scheme - has tied up with app-based cab aggregator Uber - to facilitate free healthcare for its driver and delivery partners

- This is the first ever partnership of Ayushman Bharat – Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) with a private firm
- As per the MoU, Common Service Centres (CSCs) will be set up at Partners Seva Kendras across India to facilitate free healthcare for tens of thousands of driver and delivery partners of Uber
- CSC’s Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) at these centres will help verify eligibility and issue e-cards to driver and delivery partners for the Ayushman Bharat Scheme
- Eligible driver and delivery partners will pay only Rs 30 to obtain an Ayushman Bharat card to provide access to the services under the scheme
- The scheme provides Rs 500,000 of healthcare benefits for free secondary and tertiary treatment to each eligible family per year in government and empanelled private hospitals.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi - approved the ‘Pradhan Mantri Jaiv Indhan- Vatavaran Anukool fasal awashesh Nivaran (JI-VAN) Yojana’ for providing financial support to the Integrated Bioethanol Projects

- The scheme aims to incentivise 2G Ethanol sector for setting up commercial projects and increasing Research & Development in this area
- The Pradhan Mantri JI-VAN Yojana was allocated a financial outlay of Rs 1969.50 crore for the period 2018-19 to 2023-24
The Centre for High Technology (CHT), a technical body under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, will be the implementation Agency for the scheme.

The Union Government launched the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) programme in 2003 for blending of 10% ethanol in Petrol to address environmental concerns due to fossil fuel burning.

The present policy allows procurement of ethanol produced from molasses and non-food feedstock like celluloses.

At present, the EBP is being implemented in 21 States and 4 UTs of the country.

The Union Government – signs $926 million loan agreement with Asian Development Bank (ADB) - to operationalise two lines (of about 58 km) of the Mumbai Metro Rail System

The approved loan is the single largest infrastructure loan in ADB history approved by its Board.

The project will be implemented by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) and expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

National Policy on Software Products 2019

The National Policy on Software Products 2019 aims to develop India as the global software product hub through innovation, improved commercialisation, sustainable Intellectual Property (IP), promoting technology startups and specialised skill sets.

It intends to create Indian software products Industry of $70-80 billion with direct and indirect employment of 3.5 million by 2025.

Initially, an outlay of Rs 1500 crore is allocated as Software Product Development Fund (SPDF) and Research & Innovation fund, for a period of 7 years.

National Mineral Policy 2019

The National Mineral Policy 2019 will ensure more effective regulation. It will lead to sustainable mining sector development in future while addressing the issues of project affected persons especially those residing in tribal areas.

The aim of National Mineral Policy 2019 is to have a more effective, meaningful and implementable policy that brings in further transparency, better regulation and enforcement, balanced social and economic growth as well as sustainable mining practices.

Details:

- The National Mineral Policy 2019 includes provisions which will give boost to mining sector such as
  - Introduction of Right of First Refusal for RP/PL holders,
  - encouraging the private sector to take up exploration,
- auctioning in virgin areas for composite RP cum PL cum ML on revenue share basis,
- encouragement of merger and acquisition of mining entities and
- transfer of mining leases and creation of dedicated mineral corridors to boost private sector mining areas.
- The 2019 Policy proposes to grant status of industry to mining activity to boost financing of mining for private sector and for acquisitions of mineral assets in other countries by private sector.
- It also mentions that long term import export policy for mineral will help private sector in better planning and stability in business.
- The Policy also mentions rationalized reserved areas given to PSUs which have not been used and to put these areas to auction, which will give more opportunity to private sector for participation.
- The Policy also mentions to make efforts to harmonize taxes, levies & royalty with world benchmarks to help private sector.
The policy aims to regulate and ensure sustainable mining sector development and practices in the country
It replaces the National Mineral Policy 2008
It intends to attract private investment through incentives apart from making efforts to create and maintain a database of mineral resources in the country
It proposes a long term export import policy for the mineral sector
It also introduces the concept of Inter-Generational Equity to support the future generations
It also intends to constitute an inter-ministerial body to institutionalise the mechanism for ensuring sustainable development in mining.

COMMITTEES

The Justice Ranjana Desai-led search committee - has finalized its recommendations for the chairperson and eight members of the anti-corruption ombudsman, Lokpal

The committee has sent a list comprising 5 names for Lokpal Head and 24 names for members of the anti-graft body — 3 each for 8 positions — to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who heads the Lokpal selection committee
The eight-member search panel, formed in September 2018, held its first meeting in January 2019
It was set a deadline of February 28 by the Supreme Court to hand over the recommended names to the Government
The search committee has former SBI chief Arundhati Bhattacharya, Isro chief A S Kiran Kumar, Former Gujarat police chief Shabbirhusein S Khandwawala, former Allahabad high court justice Sakha Ram Singh Yadav and Prasar Bharati chairman A Surya Prakash as members
The selection committee is headed by the PM and has Chief Justice of India Justice Ranjan Gogoi, Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan and former advocate general Mukul Rohatgi as members
CONFERENCES & SUMMITS

- Pakistan, one of the founding members of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) – boycotts the meeting of the Islamic grouping which began in Abu Dhabi on March 1, 2019

- This was the first time in OIC’s 50-year history that the country’s foreign minister has stayed away from the meeting, even though its delegation participated in it.
- Incidentally, 50 years ago, the then Pakistan president Gen Yahya Khan had walked out of the 57-member country- OIC summit over the same issue — inclusion of India at the meet.

AT 1ST MEET, YAHYA THREATENED PULLOUT

- India was offered membership status of OIC in 1969, when it was founded.
- Fakrul Aziz Ahmed, then minister for indl development, led the Indian delegation to the Rabat conference.
- There, a Moroccan minister asked him to either withdraw “voluntarily” or “feign illness” and not attend the meet.
- Alternatively, it was suggested India attend as an “observer” — a downgrade from the membership status.
- The reason: Pak president Yahya Khan had locked himself up in his room and threatened to boycott the summit if the Indian delegation was present.
- Jordan, Turkey and Iran also supported Pakistan.
- The reason for Khan’s tantrum: riots in Ahmedabad.
- The Indian delegation was not informed about any of the official meetings/sessions, which were held in secret.

- Pakistan was protesting against the decision to invite Indian External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj as guest of honour at the meeting.
PERSONALITIES

IAF’s Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman – crosses over via the Wagah-Attari border to India – 60 hours after taken captive in PoK after being shot down while chasing an intruding Pakistani F-16

He was accompanied to the border by Group Captain Joy Thomas Kurien, India’s air attache in Islamabad, and by a director of the Pakistan Foreign Office.

After entering the country, he was immediately taken to the airport and flown in an IAF Embraer jet to New Delhi.

As per protocol, he will first undergo a thorough medical examination to ascertain the extent of his injuries due to the ejection and subsequent beating by a mob, when he bailed out from his MiG-21 and landed in PoK.

DEFENCE

Air Marshal Raghunath Nambiar - appointed as the new chief of the IAF’s Western Air Command (WAC)

He replaces Air Marshal C Hari Kumar, who retired after over 39 years in service.

WAC is the most important command out of the five regional commands of IAF.

It is spread from Ladakh to Bikaner, at an area of around 400,000 sq km with its headquarters in New Delhi.

It controls 18 important airbases like Srinagar, Leh, Thoise, Awantipur, Ambala, Amritsar, Halwara, Bikaner, Nal and Udhampur, among others.

Air Marshal Nambiar, an experimental test pilot who has flown 42 types of aircraft, has the distinction of having the most number of flying hours to his credit on Mirage-2000 fighters in the IAF.

Of his total 5,100 hours of flying experience, the senior officer has chalked over 2,300 hours on Mirage-2000s.

He was also the project test pilot for the indigenous Tejas Light Combat Aircraft.
**SPACEX 1st PRIVATE-MANNED MISSION – DEMO-1**

**Will Musk Help US Restart Its Manned Missions To Space?**

The SpaceX launch — the mission’s called demo-1 — will be the first time a privately built spacecraft designed to carry humans is headed to the ISS.

No American astronaut has blasted off from US soil for a space mission since July 2011, when the Atlantis, the last mission of NASA’s Space Shuttle programme, returned to Earth.

It is difficult to believe that though US is at the forefront of space exploration, it hasn’t had the ability to conduct human missions to space for almost nine years now. But that may begin to change as soon as later today as SpaceX holds the first test of its space capsule designed to take humans to the International Space Station (ISS). Success on Saturday will only be the first milestone in a months-long process as US tries to regain self-sufficiency in one area where it has had to accept help from Russia.

**Dummy rider now, astronaut to follow in 6 months**

- There will be no humans on board on Saturday. Instead of a crew, it will be carrying a heavily wired dummy christened “Ripley” (in homage to Sigourney Weaver’s character in the film, “Alien”)
- If the demo-1 test is successful, then an uncrowed abort test — a test of a launch escape system to check whether the crew can be efficiently moved to safety in case of an emergency on the launch pad — will be held
- If it all goes to plan — there are heavy duty safety certifications to be obtained — then the first crewed SpaceX test flight to ISS could take off in July

**SpaceX repurposed its cargo Dragon capsule**

After making 16 deliveries to ISS using the cargo version of Dragon, it is overhauling it for carrying astronauts.

**Objective: To ISS and back**

After take-off from Cape Canaveral in Florida, the 6-day mission will see the Crew Dragon capsule dock with ISS whereupon the three astronauts in ISS will enter the Dragon. They will unload the fresh supplies in the capsule and, in turn, load it up with science samples and old equipment.

The capsule will undock on March 8 and, as it returns to Earth, parachute into the Atlantic a couple hundred miles off the Florida coast.

**Composite Top Capsule**

- Height: 229.6 ft
- Total Mass: 5,49,054 kg

It is a two-stage rocket and the first in the orbital class that is capable of reflight.

In 2012, Falcon 9 carried the Dragon capsule for a successful mission to ISS, making SpaceX the first commercial company ever to visit the station.

Boeing is also in the race to take US astronauts to space in US-made rockets and is aiming for an April test flight of its Starliner capsule without crew.

Source: Axios, Agencies, SpaceX, Graphic: Sunit Singh