

CURRENT AFFAIRS

WEEKLY

WEEK - 1
JANUARY, 2020

PRELIMS

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

The Asiatic Lion Census is scheduled to take place

ECONOMY

'eBkay' - online auction platform for assets attached by banks

National Infrastructure Pipeline

GEOGRAPHY

Drake Passage and "The Impossible Row" project

What is Annular Solar Eclipse

HISTORY

Battle of Koregaon

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Budapest Convention

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

NITI Aayog has released the 2019 SDG India Index

Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana

SOCIAL ISSUES

PM - KISAN Scheme

Swachh Survekshan 2020

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

107th Indian Science Congress

Aditya - ISRO's Solar Mission

Avangard Hypersonic Missile System

Gaganyaan Mission

MISCELLANEOUS

Central Equipment Identify Register

Divyang Friendly Features in Buses

ISRO to set up second launch port

Krishi Karman Awards

MANI application of RBI

Political Parties

Registration Tracking Management System (PPRTMS)

Tejas Express

World's oldest rhino' dies in Tanzania

Young Scientists

Laboratories

MAINS

ECONOMY

Indian Railways Reforms: A single cadre for Railways management

ENVIRONMENT & ECOLOGY

Australia Fire

GEOGRAPHY

Why this winter is extra cold in India

HISTORY

Madan Mohan Malviya

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Climate Summit CoP 25: A Critique

GSSCORE

An Institute for Civil Services

www.iasscore.in

— **Disclaimer** —

The current affairs articles are segregated from prelims and mains perspective, such separation is maintained in terms of structure of articles. Mains articles have more focus on analysis and prelims articles have more focus on facts.

However, this doesn't mean that Mains articles don't cover facts and PT articles can't have analysis. You are suggested to read all of them for all stages of examination.

CURRENT AFFAIRS ANALYST

WEEK-1 (JANUARY, 2020)

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SECTION: A
(MAINS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

INDIAN RAILWAYS REFORMS: A SINGLE CADRE FOR RAILWAYS MANAGEMENT

CONTEXT

- Recently, the Cabinet recently approved to trim the Railway Board and merge service cadres.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The Cabinet recently approved **trimming of the Railway Board**, the powerful body that governs the Indian Railways. From **nine**, the Board will now have only **five Members**.
- The Cabinet also decided to merge all **central service cadres of Railways officers into a single Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS)**. Now, any eligible officer could occupy any post, including Board Member posts, irrespective of training and specialisation, since they will all belong to IRMS.
- The five members of the Board, other than a Chairman-cum-CEO, will now be the Members Infrastructure, Finance, Rolling Stock, Track, and Operations and Business Development. The Board will also have independent members, who will be industry experts with at least 30 years of experience, but in non-executive roles, only attending Board meetings.
- The move has led to protests from serving civil servants, prompting the Railway Board to reach out to them to allay their concerns.

◎ ANALYSIS

Present System in Railways

- The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited after the Indian Engineering Service Examination, and civil servants through the Civil Services Examination. The civil servants are in the Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS), Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS) and Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS). The engineers are in five technical service cadres — Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE), Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME), Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE), Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSSE) and the Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS).
- Until the 1950s, the Railways system was run by officers from just three main streams: Traffic, Civil Engineering, and Mechanical. The other streams emerged as separate services over time.

Need for Reform

- There are 8 Group A services in Indian Railways (IR) — IRPS (Indian Railway Personnel Service), IRTS (Indian Railway Traffic Service), IRSS (Indian Railway Stores Service), IRSME (Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers), IRSEE (Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers), IRSE (Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers), IRSE (Indian Railway Service of Engineers) and IRAS (Indian Railway Accounts Service). Five—IRSME, IRSEE, IRSS and IRSE—are so-called technical services, recruited through an engineering service examination conducted by UPSC. Three—IRPS, IRTS and IRAS—are non-technical, recruited through the civil service examination conducted by UPSC. It has led to inter-departmental rivalry. The government wants to end inter-departmental rivalries, which it says have been hindering growth for decades. **Railway Minister Piyush Goyal said departments were working “in silos”**.
- Unification has been recommended by several committees—**Prakash Tandon** (1994), **Khanna** (1998), **Rakesh Mohan** (2001), **Sam Pitroda** (2012) and **Bibek Debroy** (2015). Prakash Tandon Committee recommended a single service. A Gupta-Narain Committee (1994), set up to examine feasibility of implementing this single service idea, questioned whether this could be done.
- Bibek Debroy committee in 2015 has noted that “departmentalism” is a major problem in the system.** Most committees have said merger of the services in some form would be a solution. **The Debroy report recommended merging of all services to create two distinct services: Technical and Logistics.** But it did not say how to merge the existing officers.
- A separate exam under the Union Public Service Commission is proposed to be instituted in 2021 to induct IRMS officers.

Why are officers opposed to the move?

- The questions started with a proposal to merge all 8,400 officers in the eight services — five technical and three non-technical — to prepare a common seniority list and a general pool of posts, especially in higher managerial ranks. The Cabinet has decided that a Group of Secretaries, and then a Group of Ministers through the ‘Alternate Mechanism’, will look at how best to do this.

- Those protesting the government's decision say that the merger is unscientific and against established norms, because it proposes to merge two fundamentally dissimilar entities, with multiple disparities.
- First, the civil servants come from all walks of life after clearing the Civil Services Examination. The engineers usually sit for the Engineering Services Examination right after getting an engineering degree. Various studies have noted that engineers join the Railways around the age of 22-23, while the civil servants join when they are around 26, barring exceptions. The age difference starts to pinch at the later stages of their careers, when higher-grade posts are fewer. There are more engineers than civil servants.
- Protesters are also saying that the merger is against the service conditions which civil servants sign up for while choosing an alternative if they cannot make it to IAS.

How pronounced is this skew?

- The Railways have legitimised a system wherein an officer with a certain number of years left in service will be considered eligible for general-management higher posts, the most important of which is that of General Manager, who heads zones and production units.
- An officer, irrespective of seniority in his batch and acumen, requires at least two years of service left to be eligible for GM. There are 27 such posts, including as the heads of the 17 zonal railways.
- While any officer from any service can be considered for GM, civil servants have often found themselves at a disadvantage since they don't have the required service tenure left. Today, of the 27 posts, civil servants occupy only two. One of them is from the Traffic service, not just because of merit but also because the Member (Traffic) post cannot be filled by anyone other than a Traffic service officer and, to be the Member (Traffic), an officer needs to have served as GM. And only engineers have been Chairman Railway Board since July 2013.
- In the fields where the Railways are actually operated, the share of civil servants in junior-to-middle levels is over 40 per cent. But in higher management, their representation is around 16-17 per cent.

What will change with the restructure?

- In inter-departmental seniority — a complex process to fix, which has led to court cases in the past — problems arise when different services compete for posts that are open to all — like those of Divisional Railway Managers (DRMs), GMs, and subsequently, the Chairman Railway Board. And here lies the major criticism of the move.

- The civil servants are saying that if all present cadres are merged and even higher departmental posts become open to all, engineers, being in larger numbers and of a certain age profile, may end up occupying most posts, if not all.
- Another aspect is the suitability of jobs. The move, many say, emerges from the "simplistic" belief that while non-technical specialists cannot do technical jobs, technocrats can do both. The counter-argument is that civil servants in government, by virtue of the screening process and subsequent training, possess acumen and skills that go beyond academic specialisation.

How did the Railways get here?

- Departmental posts are ring-fenced; promotions happen within each department from officers of that service. The problem starts when, within a department, there are too many officers eligible for a few posts. A department needs a constant supply of posts in higher grades to keep promoting its seniors so that the juniors can keep getting timely promotions.
- In the Railways, this has happened either organically when the government restructured the cadres and created new posts at intervals of several years, or through the execution of projects.
- Across the Railways, the internal attempt by each department has always been to get a bigger share of resources to spend on projects, although the limited funds are meant for all. Until recently, for execution of each project, departments could create "temporary" posts, called "work-charged" posts, funded through money from the particular project. Departments would seek more projects since the byproduct was more work-charged posts — and that meant more promotional avenues for the department's officers. The departments grew, promotional prospects expanded, even if Railways did not. The "temporary" posts were almost never surrendered, and were "regularised" over time. This was most prevalent in the technical departments and, to an extent, in the Accounts department as well.
- In the cadre-restructuring exercise, overseen by the Cabinet and the Cabinet Secretary, work-charged posts have been banned. But a majority of the "temporary" posts were absorbed in regular cadres.
- In 2015, the government merged the verticals (not cadres) of Electrical and Mechanical on "functional lines" to make the Rolling Stock and the Traction departments. Electrical was made in charge of locomotives, and Mechanical of coaches, wagons, AC — even though the Railways are an electrical system. So Mechanical verticals working in one field started reporting to an Electrical boss and vice versa, with many of them losing influence on their domain subjects.

Way Forward

- The current demand is for two distinct services instead of one — a civil services, and one that encompasses all engineering specialisations. The logic is that functionally, departments will continue to exist through various technical and non-technical specialisations, so merging them will not end departmentalism per se.
- The government has on record assured all existing officers that no one's seniority will be hampered and promotion prospects will be protected.
- The protests are gathering momentum. Amid all this, one concern among the higher-ups is that the actual job of safely running trains 24/7 must not get neglected. DoPT should step in to allay the fears of civil servants and pave way for the reforms in railways.



AUSTRALIA FIRE

CONTEXT

- Wild bushfires have been ravaging Australia for several weeks now. These fires have been especially severe in the New South Wales and Victoria.

◎ BACKGROUND

- The State declared a week-long state of emergency in response to the escalating disaster.
- 916 homes have been destroyed this season, 363 more have been damaged.
- Both New South Wales and Victoria have given fire fighting authorities the power to forcibly relocate people.
- Bushfires in Australia impact extensive areas and cause property damage and loss of human life.
- Some of Australia's native flora has evolved to rely on bushfires as a means of reproduction, and fire events are an interwoven and an essential part of the ecology of the continent.
- For thousands of years, Indigenous Australians have used fire to foster grasslands for hunting and to clear tracks through dense vegetation.
- Major firestorms that result in severe loss of life are often named based on the day on which they occur, such as Ash Wednesday and Black Saturday.
- Some of the most intense, extensive and deadly bushfires commonly occur during droughts and heat waves.

What Is a Bushfire?

- One type of wildfire is known as a bushfire, an uncontrolled fire that burns through scrubland, which is common to Australia.
- Like all wildfires, a bushfire places nature and man under threat.
- There are many factors that lead to a bushfire or influence its spread. This includes the type of fuel. Some grasses as well as twigs can burn very quickly. On the other hand, large tree trunks don't burn as easily.
- The moisture of the fuel is another critical factor. Fuel that's wet is unlikely to burn. Similarly, increased humidity decreases the chances that a bushfire will start.
- On the flipside, lower humidity, higher temperature, and drier conditions all help ignite and spread a fire.
- Wind plays a key part in the spread of bushfires too. Wind provides much needed oxygen for a fire.

- A bushfire will spread up a hill much faster than it will down a hill due to the processes of convection and radiation.

These Fires Are Triggering Thunderstorms

- It's an explosive storm called pyro cumulonimbus and it can inject particles as high as 10 miles into the air.
- During a fire, heat and moisture from the plants are released, even when the fuel is relatively dry.
- Warm air is less dense than cold air so it rises, releasing the moisture and forming a cloud that lifts and ends up a thunderstorm started by fire.
- It happens from time to time in Australia and other parts of the world, including Canada.

Are the Australian trees prone to burning?

- Eucalyptus trees are especially flammable, "like gasoline on a tree."
- Chemicals in them make them catch fire easier, spread to the tops of trees and get more intense.
- Eucalyptus trees were a big factor in 2017 fires in Portugal that killed many people.

Major causes of Bush fires

- Australia's deadly fires have been fuelled by a combination of extreme heat, prolonged drought and strong winds.
- The country is in the grip of a heat wave, with record-breaking temperatures.
- Major parts of the country are experiencing rainfall shortfalls.
- Trees, shrubs and grasslands have turned into the perfect tinder for flames.
- Global warming is intensifying the fires.
- Indian Ocean Dipole is also among one of the reason as it brings drought like conditions and decline in precipitation plays a major role in intensifying fires.

Effects on Biodiversity

- The destruction of standing cavity trees as well as dead logs on the ground has negative effects on most small mammal species.
- Fires can cause the displacement of territorial birds and mammals, which may upset the local balance

and ultimately result in the loss of wildlife, since displaced individuals have nowhere to go.

- Loss of fruit-trees results in overall decline in bird and animal species that rely on fruits for food; this effect is particularly pronounced in tropical forests.
- It alters the hydrological cycle.
- It causes harm to the coral reefs, certain plant species.
- Too much of smoke can lower down the rate of photosynthesis.
- Fires turn forests into grasslands.
- Depletion of Ozone layer can also be its one of the outcome.

How can Prevention be done?

- Obtaining a burning permit for burning grass, brush, slash or other debris in or within a prescribed distance of forest land.
- A work permit for any work in forest land involving two or more people.
- Burn only natural vegetation or untreated wood products.

- Burn piles are at least 50 feet from structures and 500 feet from any forest slash.
- Clear the area around the burn pile of any flammable debris.
- Keep fire fighting equipment handy - a connected water hose or at least five gallons of water and a shovel should be nearby.
- Don't burn if it's too windy to burn - if trees are swaying, flags are extended, or waves appear on open water.
- Be prepared to extinguish the fire if it becomes a nuisance.
- Attend the fire until it is completely out.
- Smoking should not be done while moving from one place to another in forest land.
- Power saws must have a proper muffler and be accompanied by a round point shovel or fire extinguisher.
- Cars, trucks and machinery must have proper exhaust systems when operated in or near forest land. Exhaust spark arresters are a requirement on certain machines.

WHY THIS WINTER IS EXTRA COLD IN INDIA

CONTEXT

- The unusually cold December this year could just be another instance of extreme climates becoming more and more frequent, a result of climate change. Across the world, the frequency and intensity of both heat waves and cold waves have increased in the last few years.

ABOUT

- Extreme cold temperatures, rainfall and intense fog in the months of December and January are witnessed by north and northwest India.
- Every year, in the second half of December and the first half of January, temperatures routinely drop to 2-4°C at some point of the day in many places in north and northwest India.
- In December, the maximum daily temperature does not rise beyond 16-18°C in most of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and western Uttar Pradesh.
- In Delhi and northern Rajasthan, daily maximum temperatures are usually not over 20-22°C for most of December.
- This has happened only four times in the last 118 years, and the IMD has said this month would most likely become the second coldest December for Delhi since 1901.
- This is already the longest such spell for December since 1997.

How cold is cold/Meaning?

- A cold-day condition is said to prevail when the maximum temperature during the day is at least 4.5°C below normal.
- If the maximum temperature is at least 6.5°C below normal, it is classified as a severe cold day.

Causes for these conditions

- Scientists say there is nothing unusual in the climatic conditions that influence temperatures in this region at this time of the year.
- The cold wave usually arrives from the west, through the Western Disturbance wind system.
- This system is also responsible for causing rains in northern and northwestern parts, after having picked up moisture on its way from the Mediterranean Sea.
- The intensity of the cold also depends on the amount of snowfall that happens in Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and nearby areas.
- They combine in different ways to produce different kinds of winter conditions.

- The frequency and intensity of both heat waves and cold waves have increased in the last few years, and are predicted to increase further. The same is the case with extreme rainfall and drought.
- Flow of north-westerly winds over northwest India that too over much lower levels, further fuelled the chill factor, making the days much colder than normal during December.
- This extended cold spell has been triggered due to low stratus clouds that are blanketed over a large geographical area — between Pakistan, cutting across India and running up to Bangladesh.

India Meteorological Department (IMD)

- The IMD is the national meteorological service of the country and it is the chief government agency dealing in everything related to meteorology, seismology and associated subjects.
- It was formed in 1875.
- The IMD is under the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India.
- IMD mandate:
 - ▶ To take meteorological observations and provide current information and forecasting information for the most favorable operation of weather-dependent activities such as irrigation, agriculture, aviation, shipping, offshore oil exploration and so on.
 - ▶ To warn against severe weather phenomenon such as tropical cyclones, dust storms, norwesters, heat waves, cold waves, heavy rains, heavy snow, etc.
 - ▶ To provide meteorological related statistics needed for agriculture, industries, water resources management, oil exploration, and any other strategically important activities for the country.
 - ▶ To engage in research in meteorology and allied subjects.
 - ▶ To detect and locate earthquakes and evaluate seismicity in various parts of the country for developmental projects.

Western Disturbances

- Western Disturbance is a frequently used terminology to describe weather in the Indian sub-continent.
- Western Disturbance can be defined as "a low pressure area or a trough over surface or the upper-air in the westerly winds regime, north of 20°N, causing changes in pressure, wind pattern

and temperature fields. It is accompanied by cloudiness, with or without precipitation."

- Western Disturbances originate in the Caspian Sea or the Mediterranean Sea as extra-tropical cyclones. They gradually travel across the middle-east from Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to enter the Indian sub-continent.



MADAN MOHAN MALVIYA

CONTEXT

- December 25 is the birth anniversary of Madan Mohan Malviya, the famed Indian educationist and freedom fighter who is also called 'Mahamana'.

◎ BACKGROUND

- He was an Indian educationist and politician notable for his role in the Indian independence movement.
- He was four times president of Indian National Congress.
- He was respectfully addressed as Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and also addressed as Mahamana.
- He was the founder of Banaras Hindu University (BHU).
- He has been conferred the Bharat Ratna along with former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2014.
- Malaviya was born in Allahabad, North-Western Provinces, India on 25 December 1861.

Malviya and his life

- Malaviya is credited with popularising the term 'Satyameva Jayate' (Truth alone triumphs) - India's national motto.
- He did not coin the term. It is a mantra from the Upanishads, written thousands of years ago.
- He was president of the Indian National Congress party four times - in 1909, 1918, 1932 and 1933.
- Malaviya is often described as a Hindu nationalist, but he always strived for Hindu-Muslim unity. He gave two famous speeches on communal harmony - one in Lahore in 1922 and in Kanpur 1931.
- Malaviya, who practiced as a lawyer at Allahabad High Court, defended most of the accused in the 1922 Chauri Chaura riots in Gorakhpur in UP and is said to have saved 153 accused from getting death penalty.
- His multifaceted personality made him, at the same time, a great patriot, an educationist with a vision, a social reformer, an ardent journalist, reluctant but effective lawyer, a successful parliamentarian and an outstanding statesman.
- Among Malaviya's many achievements, the most monumental was the establishment of the Banaras Hindu University or Kashi Hindu Vishvavidyalaya.
- In the course of his lifetime Banaras Hindu University came to be known as a Capital of Knowledge acknowledged across India and the World.

- He was staunch opponent of Separate electorates and so disapproved Lucknow pact (Congress - league) of 1916. He was also opposed to Khilafat Movement.

Biography-

- Malaviya was the son of Pandit Brij Nath, a noted Sanskrit scholar, and his early education took place at two Sanskrit pathshalas (traditional schools).
- After graduating from Muir Central College, Allahabad, in 1884, he took up teaching in a local school.
- He was a diligent scholar and instructor, but he was more attracted to politics, and he made his political debut at the 1886 Calcutta (Kolkata) session of the Indian National Congress.
- Malaviya also served on the Imperial Legislative Council (1909-20).
- He participated actively in debates on issues including free and compulsory primary education, the prohibition on recruiting of Indian indentured labour in the British colonies, and the nationalization of railways.
- Though a strong supporter of Congress, Malaviya helped establish the Hindu Mahasabha ("Great Society of Hindus") in 1906, which brought diverse local Hindu nationalist movements together.

Contribution in Education Sector-

- Malaviya, who was keenly interested in uplifting the educational standards of the country, was the principal founder in 1916 of the Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi, a premier institution of learning in India.
- He chose Banaras as the site, because of the centuries old tradition of learning, wisdom and spirituality inherent to the place.
- His vision was to blend the best of Indian education called from the ancient centres of learning - Takshashila and Nalanda and other hallowed institutions, with the best tradition of modern universities of the west.
- Great minds and personalities like Annie Besant, Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Shyama Charan De and many others joined hand with him in his quest for knowledge, arousing the national spirit in India and winning freedom with the power of education and righteousness.

- He served as the university's vice-chancellor for some two decades (1919–38) and remained active at the school until his death.
- Malaviya's consciousness toward the public led to the launch of his own Hindi-language weekly, the *Abhyudaya* (1907), the *Leader of Allahabad*, an English-language daily (1909), and the Hindi monthly the *Maryada* (1910).
- In addition, he was chairman of the board of directors of the *Hindustan Times* from 1924 until he died.

His Contribution to Freedom movement-

- He was perhaps only freedom fighter, who was involved in politics of congress right from beginning i.e. 1886 and remained active till his death in 1946.
- Apart from freedom fighter he was an educator, social reformer, journalist, and lawyer.
- On the ideological level, he was a moderate, traditionalist and nationalist.

Social Work-

- Pt. Madan Mohan Malaviya was the founder of several organisation and edited magazines of high standard in order to promote Hindu ideals of Sanatan Dharma, and to build India as a strong and developed country in the world.
- For this purpose, he founded "Prayaga Hindu Samaj", and wrote served articles on the Contemporary issues and problems of the country.
- In 1884, he became the member of 'Hindi Uddharini Pratinidhi Sabha'.
- In 1885, he edited 'Indian Union' English weekly.
- In 1887, he established "Bharata Dharma Mahamandal", to propagate Sanatan Dharma and Hindu culture. He was editor of 'Hindustan'.
- In 1889, he edited 'Indian Opinion'.
- In 1891, he become barrister and started practicing at Allahabad High Court. He pleaded successfully for many significant cases during these days.
- He left the law practice in 1913 and decided to serve the nation for attaining freedom from British rule.
- Mahamana was keenly interested to help the students for better learning and living and for this sake he arranged to build a Hostel named 'MacDonnell Hindu Hostel' at Allahabad, and in 1889, he also established there a library.
- In 1942, he founded Goraksha Mandal.
- He took up the cause of Harijans and worked for their upliftment along with Gandhi Ji. The Harijan Sevak Sangh was founded at a meeting in 1933 at which Pandit Malviya presided. He worked

for eradication of untouchability and to enable temple entry for Harijans. However, he believed in Varnaashram system (as did Gandhi ji).

Brief timeline

Brief Summary of the Malaviya's Life	
25.12.1861	Born in Allahabad
1884	B.A. from Calcutta University
December 1886	2 nd Congress in Calcutta under chairmanship of Dadabhai Nouroji. Speech on the issue of representation in Councils
July 1887	Editorship of the <i>Hindosthan</i> in <i>Kalakankar</i> . Founding conference of Bharat Dharma Mandal
July 1889	Leaving editorship joins LL.B. in Allahabad
March 1898	Submits memorandum about Hindi to U.P. Lt. Governor
1902-1903	Construction of Hindu Boarding House in Allahabad
January 1906	Convened Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha on Kumbha in Allahabad. Propagation of liberal Sanatan Dharma. Decision to open university in Banaras
1907	Editorship of the <i>Abhyudaya</i> . Propagation of Sanatan Dharma and democratic principles
1909	Editorship of the English daily <i>Leader</i> . Chaired the Lahore Congress
October 1910	Presidential address in 1 st Conference of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan
22.11.1911	Formation of the Hindu University Society
December 1911	At 50 gave up practice. Decision to serve country and work for establishing the university
February 1915	Formation of Prayaga Seva Samiti under his chairmanship
October 1915	The Banaras Hindu University Bill passed
March 1916	Bill against Indentured Labour system in Councils
1918	Formation of Scout Association by Seva Samiti

December 1918	Chaired Annual Congress Conference in Delhi
Nov. 1919-Sep. 1939	Vice Chancellor, B.H.U.
19 April 1919	Chaired Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in Bombay
January 1922	Convened all party conference
16 December 1922	Speech on Hindu Muslim goodwill in Lahore
1924	Formation of Independent Party in District and Assembly. Satyagraha on Sangam [Confluence of rivers] in Allahabad. Debate on the Steel Conservation Bill

August 1926	Formation of Congress Independent Party with Lala Lajpat Rai
1931	Took part with Gandhi in the London Round Table Conference
March 1932	Formation of All India Swadeshi Union in Banaras
20 April 1932	Nominated President of Delhi Congress. Arrested
April 1932	As Calcutta Congress President arrested in Asansole
November 1939	Appointed life Rector of BHU
1941	Founded <i>Goraksha</i> Mandal
12 November -1946	Passed Away

CLIMATE SUMMIT COP 25: A CRITIQUE

CONTEXT

- Recently 25th Conference of Parties (CoP 25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change concluded in December 2019 at Madrid.

◎ BACKGROUND

UNFCCC: Institutional Arrangements

The Conference of the Parties (COP)

- Article 7.2 defines the COP as the “supreme body” of the Convention, as it is its highest decision-making authority. The climate change process revolves around the annual sessions of the COP.
- COP President and Bureau
- The office of the COP President normally rotates among the five United Nations regional groups. The President is usually the environment minister of his or her home country. S/he is elected by acclamation immediately after the opening of a COP session. Their role is to facilitate the work of the COP and promote agreements among Parties.
- The work of the COP and each subsidiary body is guided by an elected Bureau. To ensure continuity, it serves not only during sessions, but between sessions as well.

Subsidiary Bodies (SBs)

- The Convention establishes two permanent subsidiary bodies (SBs), namely the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA), by Article 9, and the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), by Article 10. These bodies advise the COP.
- The SBSTA's task is to provide the COP “with timely advice on scientific and technological matters relating to the Convention”.
- The SBI's task is to assist the COP “in the assessment and review of the effective implementation of the Convention”

The Secretariat

- The secretariat, also known as the Climate Change Secretariat, services the COP, the SBs, the Bureau and other bodies established by the COP.

Other Bodies

- Other bodies have been set up by the COP to undertake specific tasks. These bodies report back to the COP when they complete their work

- COP 1 established two ad hoc groups to conduct negotiations on specific issues.
- COP 11 established the “Dialogue” to exchange experiences and analyse strategic approaches for long-term cooperative action to address climate change.

- The UNFCCC, signed in 1992 at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development is also known as the Earth Summit, the Rio Summit or the Rio Conference
- The UNFCCC entered into force on March 21, 1994, and has been ratified by 197 countries.
- The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, to assess the magnitude and timing of changes, estimate their impacts, present strategies for how to respond and to provide an authoritative source of up-to-date interdisciplinary knowledge on climate change.

Objective

- According to Article 2, the Convention's ultimate objective is “to achieve, stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system”.
- This objective is qualified in that it “should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner”.

◎ ANALYSIS

Why CoP 25 is a failure?

- The key deliverables from the 25th Conference of Parties (CoP 25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Madrid (originally scheduled in **Santiago, Chile**) were two-fold:

- **Rules under Article 6** of the Paris Agreement, which deals with carbon trading or carbon markets
- The creation of a financial mechanism dedicated to **loss and damage**

With some caveats, CoP 25 failed to deliver on these requirements. Reasons for this are:

- No Consensus on Rules on carbon market
 - ▶ There was no consensus on rules under Article 6.
 - ▶ The European Union (EU) and Switzerland held that the lack of consensus on rules would not prevent the operation of carbon markets.
 - ▶ They are both relying on Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement, which deals with bilateral and mini-multilateral markets.
 - ▶ This is in contrast with Article 6.4, which creates a centralised, global market — the Sustainable Development Mechanism, which effectively succeeds the Clean Development Mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol. It is clear that the Article 6.4 market cannot operate without consensus on rules.
 - ▶ Article 6.2 is a little different. It does not create a market. It regulates bilateral and mini-multilateral markets, and it does so indirectly. It sets up conditions under which credits from these markets can be used to achieve a country's national targets (nationally determined contributions, or NDCs).
- Lack of Clarity on Loss and Damage
 - ▶ Loss and damage refers to the unavoidable, irreversible impacts of climate change, where mitigation has failed and adaptation is not possible.
 - ▶ It is important to distinguish it from adaptation, particularly, because while some 'new and additional' finance was committed to adaptation in the Paris Decision, loss and damage has not been similarly addressed yet.
 - ▶ Financial support is one of the work-streams of the **Warsaw International Mechanism** on Loss and Damage (WIM), which was set up in 2013. Work on this front has remained stagnant for six years, and vulnerable countries and activists were clear that COP 25 needed to establish secure new and additional finance for loss and damage.
 - ▶ The debate coming into this CoP was initially centered on whether this finance would take the form of:

- A finance arm of the WIM — opposed by developed countries because they consider it an admission of liability for climate change
- A financing 'window' under the Green Climate Fund (GCF) — opposed by developing countries because it would risk diluting the distinction between loss and damage and adaptation, and effectively reducing the amount of finance available for both

India's mixed role in CoP 25

- India played a mixed role at the recently concluded 25th Conference of Parties (CoP 25) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at Madrid.
- Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar emphasised the transition of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) credits earned under the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement. He effectively demanded the carryover of the untraded emission reduction certificates held by Indian companies (estimated at 750 million Certified Emissions Reductions or CERs), which they can sell to raise funds.
- On the question of 'loss and damage', the minister urged developed countries to give financial teeth to the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM). The Warsaw Mechanism has been resisted by these countries due to their paranoia (officially enshrined) that the provision of finance would imply admission of legal liability.
- India played a strong role in critiquing the developed world's continuing poor record on climate action.
- India also took a lead in calling for more finance for developing countries for climate action, with the minister emphasising that "not even 2 per cent" of the promised "\$1 trillion in the last 10 years" had been delivered.

Conclusion

- It is crucial that India continue to push developed countries in this fashion as the entire global climate action framework has been put in jeopardy by the inaction of big polluters.

SECTION: B

(PRELIMS)

CURRENT AFFAIRS

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THE ASIATIC LION CENSUS IS SCHEDULED TO TAKE PLACE

◎ CONTEXT

- It is scheduled to take place in May 2020. Around 8,000-10,000 cameras will be used to carry out the 2020 lion census in Gujarat, the last abode of the Asiatic lion.

◎ ABOUT

- For the first time, the expertise of Wildlife Institute of India (WII) will be perused in the Census.
- The WII had sent a proposal to the Gujarat government for finalizing the modalities of the Census.
- In 2015 Lion Census, it had counted 523 lions in the state. The number has expected to rise with internal assessments of the forest department which indicates that the population may have crossed the 1000 mark.

About Asiatic lions

- They belong to the category of Pantherine cats.
- The Asiatic Lions in Gujarat is restricted to Gir National Park in the state.
- It is listed as 'Endangered' under the IUCN Red List.
- It is listed in Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- In the initial stage, the lions were spread from the east of the Indus River to West Bengal and also to Narmada river in Central India.
- Until the 19th century, it occurred in Saudi Arabia,, eastern Turkey, Iran, Mesopotamia.
- Since the turn of the 20th century, it is restricted to the Gir Forest National Park and surrounding areas.
- The lion is one of five pantherine cats inhabiting India, along with the Bengal tiger (*P. tigris tigris*), Indian leopard (*P. pardus fusca*), snow leopard (*P. uncia*) and clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*).
- It was also known as the "Indian lion" and the "Persian lion".

Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is also known as Sasan Gir, a forest and wildlife sanctuary near Talala Gir in Gujarat, India.
- It is part of the Kathiawar-Gir dry deciduous forests ecoregion.
- The seven major perennial rivers of the Gir region are Hiran, Shetrunji, Datardi, Shingoda, Machhundri, Godavari and Raval.
- The four reservoirs of the area are at four dams, one each on Hiran, Machhundri, Raval and Shingoda rivers, including the biggest reservoir in the area, the Kamleshwar Dam, dubbed 'the lifeline of Gir'.

Asiatic Lion Conservation Project

- It has been launched by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change with an aim to protect and conserve the world's last ranging free population of Asiatic Lion and its associated ecosystem.
- The project activities is envisaged in a manner to cause habitat improvement, scientific interventions, disease control and veterinary care supplemented with adequate eco development works for the fringe population in order to ensure a stable and viable Lion population in the Country.
- It is a 3 year-long conservation project launched in 2018

‘EBKRAY’ - ONLINE AUCTION PLATFORM FOR ASSETS ATTACHED BY BANKS

◎ CONTEXT

- Recently, Union Finance Minister launches ‘eBkray’ auction platform for assets attached by banks.

◎ ABOUT

- eBkray is an e-auction platform to enable online auction of attached assets by banks.

Indian Banks Auctions Mortgaged Properties Information (IBAPI) portal

- It is an initiative of Indian Banks Association under the policy of the Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance to provide a platform to provide details of mortgaged properties to be auctioned online by Banks, starting with PSBs.
- The eBkray platform provides navigational links to all **PSB e-auction sites**, property search feature and presents single-window access to information on properties up for e-auction, comparison of similar properties, and also contains videos and photographs of the uploaded properties.
- Buyers can use IBAPI portal to search and get properties details and participate in the auction process. Presently 21 banks are onboard on this portal
- Currently, there are 2,457 residential, 576 commercial, 333 industrial and 18 agricultural properties are available on eBkray platform among others.
- PSBs have attached assets worth over Rs 2.3 lakh crore in the last three fiscal years.

Objectives of eBkray

- To enhance user experience through seamless access to information by the search based on the type and location of the property put up for e-auction by the banks in India.
- To enable online auction of attached assets transparently and cleanly for the improved realization of value by banks.
- It will provide navigational links to all Public Sector Banks (PSBs) e-auction sites, property search feature and will present single-window access to information on properties up for e-auction, comparison of similar properties, as well as contains videos and photographs of uploaded properties.
- The platform also helps the buyer to easily navigate to the bank e-auction site after a notified property is selected. It also helps the user to search property using State-wise, District-wise and bank-wise details.

Need

- There has been information asymmetry when bank attached assets are auctioned which will come to an end with the launch eBkray.
- Simplify auction process

◎ CONCLUSION

- The e-auction platform is now linked on Indian Banks Auctions Mortgaged Properties Information (IBAPI) portal and guidelines have been made available which will help banks in the release of cash trapped in mortgaged assets. It will also bring transparency in the process.

NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PIPELINE

◎ CONTEXT

- Finance Minister has released Report of the Task Force on National Infrastructure Pipeline for 2019-2025. She has unveiled a ₹102 lakh crore project which is in accordance with the government's vision to make India a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-25.

◎ ABOUT

- It is estimated that India would need to spend \$4.5 trillion on infrastructure by 2030 to sustain its growth rate.
- The endeavour of the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) is to make this happen in an efficient manner.
- These projects are on top of Rs 51 lakh crore spent by the Centre and the states during the last six years and the new pipeline consists of 39 per cent projects each by the Centre and states and the balance by 22 per cent by private sector.

Benefits of National Infrastructure Pipeline

- Well-planned NIP will enable more infra projects, grow businesses, creates job, improve ease of living and provide equitable access to infrastructure for all, making growth more inclusive.
- Well-developed infrastructure enhances level of economic activity, creates additional fiscal space by improving revenue base of the government, and ensures quality of expenditure focussed in productive areas.
- Provides better view of project supply, provides time to be better prepared for project bidding, reduces aggressive bids/failure in project delivery, ensures enhanced access to sources of finance as a result of increased investor confidence.

Features of National Infrastructure Pipeline

- To achieve this objective, a Task Force has been constituted to draw up the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) for each of the years from FY 2019-20 to FY 2024-25 with the approval of the Finance Minister.
- The Task Force is chaired by Secretary, DEA with CEO (NITI Aayog), Secretary (Expenditure), Secretary of the Administrative Ministries, and Additional Secretary (Investments), DEA as members and Joint Secretary (IPF), DEA as Member Secretary.
- Total project capital expenditure in infrastructure sectors in India during the fiscals 2020 to 2025 is projected at over Rs 102 lakh crore.

Sector-wise:

- According to the Task Force, Government has planned to increase participation of private sector in freight traffic. It will add 30% of net cargo by 2025 and will increase private trains to 500.
- Irrigation and rural infrastructure projects would account for ₹7.7 lakh crore each. ₹3.07 lakh crore would be spent on industrial infrastructure. Agriculture and social infrastructure would account for the rest.
- Road projects will account for ₹19.63 lakh crore while another ₹13.68 lakh crore would be for railway projects.
- Port projects would see spending of ₹1 lakh crore and airports another ₹1.43 lakh crore. ₹16.29 lakh crore would be spent on urban infrastructure and ₹3.2 lakh crore in telecom projects.
- According to the sector-wise break-up of projects made available by the Finance Ministry, ₹24.54 lakh crore investment will flow in the energy sector, and of that ₹11.7 lakh crore would be in just the power sector.
- ₹42 lakh crore NIP projects which are in the implementation stage now include expressways, national gas grid and PMAY-G.

DRAKE PASSAGE AND “THE IMPOSSIBLE ROW” PROJECT

◎ CONTEXT

- In a first, six rowers from four countries crossed the Drake Passage, in just under two weeks after pushing off from the southern tip of South America.

◎ ABOUT

- The Passage is located between Cape Horn at the tip of South America and the Antarctic Peninsula.
- This is the first completely human-powered crossing of the passage.
- The project was dubbed “The Impossible Row”, for which the team departed from Cape Horn in Chile and arrived at Primavera Base on San Martin Land on the Antarctic Peninsula.

What is the Drake Passage?

- The passage is named after Sir Francis Drake, who was the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe.
- The passage has an average depth of about 11,000 feet, with deeper regions going up to over 15,600 feet near the northern and southern boundaries.

Why is it considered so treacherous?

- The Drake Passage is considered one of the roughest waterways in the world because here, layers of cold seawater from the south and warm seawater from the north collide to form powerful eddies, which when combined with strong winds and storms can be treacherous for those attempting to navigate it.
- It is also the narrowest stretch in the Southern Ocean and spans approximately 800 km between the southern tip of South America and the northern tip of the West Antarctic Peninsula.
- NASA describes the waters of the passage as “notoriously turbulent, unpredictable, and frequented by icebergs and sea ice.



WHAT IS ANNULAR SOLAR ECLIPSE

◎ CONTEXT

- The last solar eclipse of this year took place in December, which will fall over the eastern hemisphere of the Earth and be visible from India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Mariana Islands and Borneo among a few other places.

◎ ABOUT

- An eclipse happens when the moon while orbiting the Earth, comes in between the sun and the Earth, due to which the moon blocks the sun's light from reaching the Earth, causing an eclipse of the sun or a solar eclipse.
- It was visible from India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Malaysia, Oman, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Mariana Islands and Borneo among a few other places.

About annular solar eclipse

- There are three types of eclipses: one is a total solar eclipse, which is visible only from a small area on Earth.
- People who are able to view the total solar eclipse are in the centre of the moon's shadow as and when it hits the Earth.
- A total solar eclipse happens when the sun, moon and Earth are in a direct line.
- The second type of a solar eclipse is a partial solar, in which the shadow of the moon appears on a small part of the sun.
- The third kind is an annular solar eclipse, which happens when the moon is farthest from the Earth, which is why it seems smaller.
- In this type of an eclipse, the moon does not block the sun completely, but looks like a "dark disk on top of a larger sun-colored disk" forming a "ring of fire".

Additional information

- Furthermore, during a solar eclipse the moon casts two shadows on the Earth, the first one is called the umbra, which gets smaller as it reaches the Earth.
- The second one is called the penumbra, which gets larger as it reaches the Earth.
- According to NASA, people standing in the umbra see a total eclipse and those standing in the penumbra see a partial eclipse.
- One of the reasons that NASA studies solar eclipses is to study the top layer of the sun called the corona.
- During an annular eclipse, NASA uses ground and space instruments to view this top layer when the sun's glare is blocked by the moon.

Where can the annular solar eclipse be viewed from In India?

- Some of the areas in India from where the annular solar eclipse can be viewed include Kannur, Ooty, Palakkad, Kozhikode, Erode Trichy, Madurai and Karaikudi among a few others.

Is it safe to view solar eclipses?

- NASA maintains that the sun can be viewed safely using the naked eye only during a total eclipse, while during partial and annular solar eclipses, the sun should not be viewed without proper equipment and techniques.
- Not using proper methods and equipment for viewing can cause permanent eye damage or severe visual loss.
- Safety equipment includes eclipse glasses and using appropriate solar filters for covering binoculars, telescopes and cameras.

BATTLE OF KOREGAON

◎ CONTEXT

- 202nd Anniversary of Battle of Koregaon Bhima

◎ ABOUT

- Bhima-Koregaon, a small village in Pune district of Maharashtra, has a rich Maratha history. Two hundred years ago, on January 1, 1818, a few hundred Mahar soldiers of the East India Company, led by the British, defeated the massive Peshwa army, led by Peshwa Bajirao II, in Koregaon.

- Legend has it that about 500 Mahar soldiers under the East India Company clashed with a 25,000-strong army of Peshwa Bajirao II.
- Mahars, at this point, were considered an untouchable community, and were not recruited in the army by the peshwas.
- This battle has, since, attained legendary stature in Dalit history.
- The Dalits who follow BR Ambedkar view this battle as a victory of Mahars over the injustice and torture meted out to them by the Brahminical Peshwas.

So What Happens There Every January?

- On January 1, 1927, Bhimrao Ambedkar started the ritual of holding a commemoration at the site of this pillar, one that is repeated every year.
- It's the Ambedkarite Dalits who gather at Bhima Koregaon to pay their respect at the Vijay Sthamb (victory pillar).
- The pillar was erected by the East India Company in memory of those who fought the battle. The names of the Mahar soldiers who unknowingly brought an end to the Peshwa rule in 1818 are inscribed on the pillar.
- Dalit Ambedkarites draw inspiration from this victory at Bhima Koregaon. Ever since Bhima-Koregaon Ranstambh Seva Sangh (BKRSS) was formed, they regard the stambh or pillar as a site of their valour and a symbol of their place in the political diaspora.
- Those protesting the commemoration of the Koregaon Bhima battle victory are miffed because it basically celebrates the "British victory" against the Marathas.

Why Bhima Koregaon is seen as a Dalit symbol?

- The battle has come to be seen as a symbol of Dalit pride because a large number of soldiers in the Company force were the Mahar Dalits.
- Since the Peshwas, who were Brahmins, were seen as oppressors of Dalits, the victory of the Mahar soldiers over the the Peshwa force is seen as Dalit assertion.
- Thus, in the first battle and the last battle (1757-1818) it was the Untouchables who fought on the side of the British and helped them to conquer India.

Arguments against it

- Ambedkar's pride in Bhima Koregaon belonged very much to that age. Ambedkar was a very original and provocative thinker. Some of his views were quite cogent but belonged to those very times.
- Many of his views on Muslims and Christians would be totally unacceptable in today's India.
- It was not as if the British were kind to the Mahars.
- The British had abolished the Mahar regiment after 1857 uprising. They started preferring upper castes that they called 'martial races'.
- The Mahar regiment was restarted only during the Second World War.

BUDAPEST CONVENTION

◎ CONTEXT

- Recently, United Nations approved a Russian-led resolution that aims to create a new convention on cybercrime when Budapest Convention is already there. India has voted in its favour. Russia has opposed the Budapest Convention, arguing that giving investigators access to computer data across borders violates national sovereignty.

◎ ABOUT

- The Council of Europe's (CoE) Cybercrime Convention is also known as the Budapest Convention. It was open for signature in 2001 and came into force in 2004.
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- The convention is the **sole legally binding international multilateral treaty on cybercrime**. It coordinates cybercrime investigations between nation-states and criminalizes certain cybercrime conduct.
- It serves as a guideline for any country developing comprehensive national legislation against Cybercrime and as a framework for international cooperation between state parties to this treaty.
- The Budapest Convention is supplemented by a Protocol on Xenophobia and Racism committed through computer systems.
- India is not a signatory to Budapest Convention.

Significance

- Almost all stakeholders agree that the current form of cross-border data sharing for law enforcement through the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) is insufficient for the digital age. However, there is an ongoing debate whether to revamp MLAT or form an entirely new system for cybercrimes in the form of this Convention.
- This Convention has eagerly called for Indian participation since its formation in 2001, but India has decided not to be a party to it.

Russia-led Resolution to replace Budapest Convention

- The Russian proposal entitled "Countering the use of information and communications technologies for criminal purposes" was recently put forth in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).
- This recent UN proposal follows previous Russian initiatives, including the "Draft United Nations Convention on Cooperation in Combating Cybercrime" in 2017 to develop a UN convention on cybercrime.
- The Russian proposal calls for creation of a committee that will convene in August 2020 in New York in order to establish a new treaty through which nation-states can coordinate and share data to prevent cybercrime.
- This draft Convention goes far beyond what the Budapest Convention allows for regarding cross-border access to data, including limiting the ability of a signatory to refuse to provide access to requested data.
- This is the reason why several human rights groups criticize the UN proposal as a way to extend a Chinese and Russian form of internet governance, or the so-called "closed Internet" or "state-controlled internet."
- If this resolution will be passed by the UNGA, it will become the second international convention on cybercrime.
- Russia and China question the Budapest Convention on the grounds of national sovereignty issues, thereby proposing their own treaty at the UN.

India's Stand

- India maintained its status as a non-member of the Europe-led Budapest Convention. Although, India voted in favour of a Russian-led UN resolution to set up a separate convention.
- According to the Intelligence Bureau (IB), data sharing with foreign law enforcement agencies infringes on national sovereignty of India.
- India has also previously argued that it will not sign onto the Budapest treaty since it was drafted without its participation.

© CONCLUSION

- The Budapest Convention was drafted by the Council of Europe. Other countries have joined, including the United States and Japan. A new U.N. treaty on cybercrime could render the Budapest Convention obsolete, further alarming rights groups. Moreover, the concerns raised by countries like Russia, China and India should be resolved to prevent mandatory information sharing under Budapest Convention.

NITI AAYOG HAS RELEASED THE 2019 SDG INDIA INDEX

◎ CONTEXT

- NITI Aayog has released the second edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, which comprehensively documents the progress made by India's States and Union Territories towards achieving the 2030 SDG targets.

◎ ABOUT

- The SDG India Index—which has been developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), United Nations in India, and Global Green Growth Institute—was launched by NITI Aayog.
- NITI Aayog has committed itself to building capacities and monitoring progress at the state level.
- Close coordination with the states over the next 5 years will further accelerate SDG localization and ensure greater improvement.
- In 2020, the world enters the final decade for achieving the SDGs—the 'Decade for Action'. And the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that we have 12 years left to save the planet from the worst effects of climate change.

Major Outcomes of the index

- India's composite score has improved from 57 in 2018 to 60 in 2019, thereby showing noticeable progress.
- The maximum gains been made in Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and 7 (affordable and clean energy).
- All three states that were in the 'Aspirant' category (with score/s in the range of 0–49)—Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam—have graduated to the 'Performer' category (50–64).
- Five states—Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Goa, and Sikkim—moved up from the 'Performer' category to the 'Front Runner' category (65–99).
- Kerala achieved the first rank in the composite SDG Index with a score of 70, followed by Himachal Pradesh at 69.
- Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu ranked at the third position with the score of 67.
- The biggest improvers since 2018 are UP (which has moved from the 29th position to the 23rd), Orissa (23rd to 15th), and Sikkim (15th to 7th). While Bihar improved its score from 48 in 2018 to 50 in 2019, it still has a long way to go in achieving the targets.

Other information

- The world is now in the fifth year of the SDG era. India's National Development Agenda is mirrored in the SDGs. India's progress in the global Goals is crucial for the world as the country is home to about one-sixth of the world's population.
- The SDG India Index 2019 tracks progress of all States and UTs on 100 indicators drawn from the MoSPI's National Indicator Framework (NIF).
- The process of selection of these indicators included multiple consultations with Union ministries/departments and States/UTs.
- The SDG India Index 2019 is more robust than the first edition on account of wider coverage of goals, targets, and indicators with greater alignment with the NIF.
- A composite score was computed in the range of 0–100 for each State/UT based on its aggregate performance across 16 SDGs.
- The higher the score of a State/UT, the closer it is towards achieving the targets.

Classification criteria based on SDG India Index score is as follows

- Aspirant: 0–49
- Performer: 50–64
- Front Runner: 65–99
- Achiever: 100

SANSAD ADARSH GRAM YOJANA

◎ CONTEXT

- Five years down the line, official data shows that the progress of SAGY has been sluggish. About two-thirds of Lok Sabha MPs are yet to select gram panchayats under Phase-4 of the scheme.

◎ ABOUT

- It has been launched in 2014 as a village development project, under which each Member of Parliament will take the responsibility of developing physical and institutional infrastructure in three villages by 2019.
- It was initiated to bring the member of parliament of all the political parties under the same umbrella while taking the responsibility of developing infrastructure in villages and turn them into model villages
- The goal was to develop three Adarsh Grams by March 2019, of which one would be achieved by 2016. Thereafter, five such Adarsh Grams (one per year) will be selected and developed by 2024.
- The distinct feature of this Yojana is that it is demand driven and inspired by society.

Funding for the scheme

- No new funds are allocated to this Yojana and funds may be raised through :
 - Funds from existing schemes, such as the Indira Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, and Backward Regions Grant Fund, etc.,
 - The Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS),
 - The gram panchayat's own revenue,
 - Central and State Finance Commission Grants, and
 - Corporate Social Responsibility funds.

Identification of Adarsh Gram

- A Gram Panchayat would be the basic unit.
- It will have a population of 3000-5000 in plain areas and 1000-3000 in hilly, tribal and difficult areas.
- In districts where this unit size is not available, Gram Panchayats approximating the desirable population size may be chosen.
- The MP would be free to identify a suitable Gram Panchayat for being developed as Adarsh Gram, other than his/her own village or that of his/her spouse.

Values of SAGY

- Adopting people's participation as an end in itself – ensuring the involvement of all sections of society in all aspects related to the life of village, especially in decision-making related to governance

- Adhering to Antyodaya – enabling the “poorest and the weakest person” in the village to achieve well being
- Affirming gender equality and ensuring respect for women
- Guaranteeing social justice
- Instilling dignity of labour and the spirit of community service and voluntarism
- Promoting a culture of cleanliness
- Living in consonance with nature – ensuring a balance between development and ecology
- Preserving and promoting local cultural heritage
- Inculcating mutual cooperation, self-help and self-reliance

Objectives of SAGY

- To trigger processes which lead to holistic development of the identified Gram Panchayats
- To substantially improve the standard of living and quality of life of all sections of the population through
 - Improved basic amenities
 - Higher productivity
 - Enhanced human development
 - Better livelihood opportunities
 - Reduced disparities
 - Access to rights and entitlements
 - Wider social mobilization
 - Enriched social capital
- To generate models of local level development and effective local governance which can motivate and inspire neighbouring Gram Panchayats to learn and adapt
- To nurture the identified Adarsh Grams as schools of local development to train other Gram Panchayats.

Recent Issues

- About two-thirds of Lok Sabha MPs are yet to select gram panchayats under Phase-4 of the scheme. The total strength of both Houses is about 790 which include elected as well as nominated members.
- In Phase-1 of SAGY, 703 MPs had adopted gram panchayats but that number went down to 497 in Phase-2 and 301 in Phase-3, showing a gradual decline in subsequent phases.
- Since the launch of the scheme on October 11, 2014, less than two months after the Prime Minister’s announcement, only 1,753 gram panchayats have been selected across four phases, way below the expected figure.
- According to data available on the Ministry of Rural Development, only 252 MPs have adopted gram panchayats under Phase-4 of SAGY — 208 members of Lok Sabha and 44 members of Rajya Sabha.

PM – KISAN SCHEME

◎ CONTEXT

- Good monsoon may have laid the foundation for record foodgrain production, but it was the launch of schemes like PM-Kisan that has set the ball rolling for structural reforms in the agriculture sector to achieve the target of doubling farmers' income.

◎ ABOUT

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) is a Central Sector scheme with 100% funding from Government of India.
- Under the Scheme an income support of Rs.6000/- per year is provided to all farmer families across the country in three equal installments of Rs.2000/- each every four months.
- The entire responsibility of identification of beneficiary farmer families rests with the State / UT Governments.
- The fund is directly transferred to the bank accounts of the beneficiaries.
- Farmers covered under the Exclusion Criteria of the Operational Guidelines are not eligible for the benefit of the Scheme.
- For enrollment, the farmer is required to approach the local patwari / revenue officer / Nodal Officer (PM-Kisan) nominated by the State Government.
- The Common Service Centres (CSCs) have also been authorized to do registration of the farmers for the Scheme upon payment of fees.
- Farmers can also do their self-registration through the Farmers Corner in the portal.
- Farmers can also edit their names in PM-Kisan database as per their Aadhaar database / card through the Farmers Corner in the portal.
- Farmers can also know the status of their payment through the Farmers Corner in the portal.

Major Objective of the scheme

- With a view to provide income support to all land holding eligible farmer families, the Government has launched PM-KISAN.
- The scheme aims to supplement the financial needs of the farmers in procuring various inputs to ensure proper crop health and appropriate yields, commensurate with the anticipated farm income.

Definition of farmer's family

- A landholder farmer's family is defined as "a family comprising of husband, wife and minor children who own cultivable land as per land records of the concerned State/ UT".
- The existing land-ownership system will be used for identification of beneficiaries for calculation of benefit.

Setting up of Project Monitoring Unit (PMU)

- A Project Monitoring Unit (PMU) at Central level will be set up in DAC&FW in the form of a Society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- This PMU shall be tasked with the responsibility of overall monitoring of the scheme and shall be headed by Chief Executive Officer (CEO).
- PMU shall also undertake publicity campaign (Information, Education and Communication-IEC).
- Each State/UT Government will designate a Nodal Department for implementation of the scheme and coordinating with Central Government with regard to implementation of Income Support Scheme.

SWACHH SURVEKSHAN 2020

◎ CONTEXT

- Recently, government released the Swachh Survekshan League in New Delhi.

◎ ABOUT

- **Swachh Survekshan League 2020** (SS League 2020) was launched for Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India.
- **Objective:** SS League 2020 was introduced with the objective of sustaining the on-ground performance of cities along with continuous monitoring of service level performance when it comes to cleanliness.
- **SS 2020 parameters:** The focus of the survey was on waste water treatment, faecal sludge management. The survey also focused on implementation of ODF+, water plus and ODF+ and ODF++ protocols of the ministry of housing and urban affairs.
- **Results:** In the category of 10 lakh plus population, Indore secured first place. Indore has remained in first place for the last three years. Following Indore, Bhopal and Surat are in second and third places respectively. In the category of population between one lakh and 10 lakhs, Jamshedpur was in 1st spot following New Delhi and Khargone.
- **Swachh Survekshan (Cleanliness survey)** is an annual survey of cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation in cities and towns across India.
 - It was launched as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which aims to make India clean and free of open defecation by 2 October 2019.
 - SS League 2020 is the fifth edition of the annual urban cleanliness survey conducted by MoHUA.
 - It is a cleanliness survey that helps in competitive federalism.
 - The first survey was undertaken in 2016 and covered 73 cities; by 2019 the survey had grown to cover 4237 cities and was said to be the largest cleanliness survey in the world.
 - The surveys are carried out by **Quality Council of India**.
 - The annual cleanliness survey aims to encourage large scale participation of citizens in cleanliness drives.
 - It aims to ensure sustainability of initiatives taken towards garbage free and open defecation free cities.
 - It aims to create awareness among all sections of the society regarding the importance of working together towards making towns and cities a better place to live in.
 - The survey also aims to foster healthy competition among towns and cities to improve their service delivery to citizens, towards creating cleaner cities.

107TH INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS

◎ CONTEXT

- Recently, PM inaugurates the 107th Indian Science Congress at University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru.

◎ ABOUT

- The theme of **107th Indian Science Congress** is "Science and Technology: Rural Development".

Facts about Science Status in the world

- India now stands at 3rd position globally, in the number of Peer-reviewed Science and Engineering Publications.
 - India has improved its ranking at Innovation Index to 52.
 - Government programmes have created more incubators in the last 5 years.
 - Technology is being harnessed at a large scale to achieve the objective of Good Governance.
- The Congress is to be hosted by Department of Science and Technology.
 - The event acts as a common platform for researchers, scientists and academicians. Around 28 plenary sessions are to be held during the event. It includes leading technologies such as Climate Smart Agriculture for food security, challenges in cancer drugs, nano materials for energy, solutions for oil and gas, environment and health care. For the first time, Farmers Science Congress is to be held on the sidelines of Indian Science
 - **Farmers Science Congress:** The congress will cover themes of innovation on integrated agriculture. It will also focus on themes of doubling farmers' income, farmer empowerment, conservation, bio diversity, etc. The experts from ICAR (Indian council of Agricultural Research) and UAS (University of Agricultural Sciences) will also participate at the event along with the farmers whose innovative methodologies have brought in huge harvests.
 - **Children Science Congress:** The Children Science Congress also called the "Rashtriya Kishre Vaigyanik Sammelana" will also be held alongside 107th India Indian Science Congress. The aim of the congress is to motivate students and increase their participation in scientific and technological fields. Apart from these, women science congress will also be held showcasing women achievements. Also, VC Science congress will be held to address the need of higher education institutions. The event will also hold Science Communicators Meet.

Origin of Indian Science Congress Association

- The Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) owes its origin to the foresight and initiative of two British Chemists, namely, Professor J. L. Simonsen and Professor P.S. MacMahon.
- It occurred to them that scientific research in India might be stimulated if an annual meeting of research workers somewhat on the lines of the British Association for the Advancement of Science could be arranged.
- The first meeting of the Congress was held in January 1914 at the premises of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

What are the main objectives of the ISCA?

- To advance and promote the cause of science in India
- To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India
- To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable.
- To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science including the rights of disposing of or selling all or any portion of the properties of the Association.
- To do and perform any or all other acts, matters and things as are conducive to, or incidental to, or necessary for, the above objects.

© CONCLUSION

- The events like Indian Science Congress will help in auguring scientific temper in the younger population and it will also help India in scaling higher feats.

ADITYA –ISRO’S SOLAR MISSION

◎ CONTEXT

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently highlighted in Mann Ki Baat program that ISRO is planning to launch its first Sun Mission Aditya L1. It is an ambitious plan of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

◎ ABOUT

- Aditya - L1 is the first Indian mission to study the outermost region of the sun, called corona.
- **Aditya-1 to Aditya L-1 Mission:** The concept of the Aditya-1 mission was to carry 400 kg of the payload called Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC). Earlier, this mission was planned to launch in an 800 km low earth orbit. But, it was found that a satellite placed in a halo orbit around the Lagrangian Point 1 (L1) can give a big advantage of viewing Sun. Thus, this mission was renamed **Aditya L-1 Mission**.
- The temperature of the solar corona goes beyond million degrees. From the ground, the corona could be seen only during total solar eclipses mainly due to the bright solar disc and the scattering of the sunlight by the earth's atmosphere. To mask the bright solar disc and study the corona, one has to go beyond the atmosphere.

Objectives

- The major scientific objectives of Aditya-1 mission are to achieve a fundamental understanding of the physical processes that heat the solar corona; accelerate the solar wind; and produce coronal mass ejections (CMEs).

Features of Aditya L1

- There will be six scientific payloads on this **400 kg satellite**.
- It will be placed in the **halo orbit** near the **L1 point of the Sun-Earth system**.
- The Aditya-L1 can now provide observations of the Sun's photosphere (soft and solid X-rays), chromosphere (UV) and the corona (visual and NIR) along with additional experiments.
- The 20 cm coronagraph, having a field of view of corona from 1.05 R to 3.0 R, will use an off axis parabolic mirror. The payload will have three CCD detectors system with a capability of simultaneous imaging in 6374 Å, 5303 Å and in 5800 Å for continuum/broadband.

6 Payloads of Aditya L-1 Mission

- **Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC):** It will help to study the origin of Coronal Mass Ejection, diagnostic parameters of solar corona and its dynamics.
- **Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT):** This payload will help to find out the image of spatially resolved Solar Photosphere as well as to measure solar irradiance variations.
- **Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya (PAPA):** It has been designed to understand the energy distribution and composition of solar winds.
- **Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS):** It will monitor X-ray flares of Solar system to study the heating system of solar corona.
- **High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS):** It will help to observe the various dynamic actions happen in solar corona to provide an estimate of solar energy.
- **Magnetometer:** This payload will monitor and measure the magnitude of the nature of Interplanetary Magnetic Field in the solar system.

◎ CONCLUSION

- ISRO's big plans for 2020 are not just Chandrayaan 3 and Gaganyaan but Aditya mission too which will place India in a distinguished class of nations in space research and technology.

AVANGARD HYPERSONIC MISSILE SYSTEM

◎ CONTEXT

- Recently, Russia's first regiment of Avangard hypersonic missiles has been put into service sending shock waves around the world.

◎ ABOUT

- **Avangard is a hypersonic glide vehicle developed by Russia.** It's designed to be carried as a multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) payload by the UR-100UTTKh, RS-26 Rubezh and RS-28 Sarmat super-heavy ICBM.
- **Avangard can presumably reach speeds up to Mach 20** and can be used to deliver nuclear and conventional payloads.
- It's designed to sit atop an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and, once launched, it uses aerodynamic forces to sail on top of the atmosphere.
- Russia has successfully tested the missile at least twice and it is expected to enter service in late 2018 or early 2019.
- During the annual state-of-the-nation **in March 2018**, the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin unveiled the Avangard and described the Hypersonic Missile as one of the six next-generation weapons that are under development.
- The initial research on hypersonic warheads started back in the mid-1980s at the time of the USSR or the Soviet Union which was ceased at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Later around the mid-1990s, Russia started working back on the project under the name 'Project 4202'. Since then, Russia has made around 14 reported tests of the Avangard Hypersonic Missile. **A Hypersonic Missile means that can travel at speed of above Mach 5 (Mach 5 speed is 5 times more than the speed of sound).**

Strategic Implications

- **Avangard is a strategically valuable weapon for two main reasons, its maneuverability and its versatility.**
- The weapon is capable of performing sharp maneuvers on its way to targets making it absolutely invulnerable for any missile defense system.
- It also boasts the ability to deploy countermeasures during flight allowing it to penetrate air and missile defenses virtually undetected.
- As for its versatility, Avangard can be fitted with both nuclear and conventional payloads depending on a situation. Moreover, even without an explosive payload, the precision and speed of the weapon is believed to have enough force to obliterate smaller targets, such as vehicles or bases, making it an invaluable weapon in the Russian arsenal.

◎ CONCLUSION

- Avangard system could penetrate current and future missile defence systems
- Not a single country possesses hypersonic weapons, let alone continental-range hypersonic weapons in the world. No doubt the US has its own hypersonic missile programme, as does China, which in 2014 said it had conducted a test flight of such as weapon.
- The announcement that Avangard is operational heralds a new and dangerous era in the nuclear arms race.
- Though Russia allowed US experts to inspect the Avangard under the rules of the 2010 New START treaty, an agreement that seeks to reduce the number of strategic nuclear missile launchers.

GAGANYAAN MISSION

◎ CONTEXT

- ISRO recently reported about four astronauts that have been identified for India's upcoming Gaganyaan mission. Gaganyaan is a crewed orbital spacecraft intended to send astronauts to space for a minimum of seven days by 2022, as part of the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme.

◎ ABOUT

- The programme will make India the fourth nation in the world to launch a Human Spaceflight Mission. So far, only the USA, Russia and China have launched human spaceflight missions.
- ISRO has developed some critical technologies like re-entry mission capability, crew escape system, crew module configuration, thermal protection system, deceleration and floatation system, sub-systems of life support system etc. required for this programme.
- GSLV Mk-III launch vehicle, which has the necessary payload capability for this mission, will be used to launch Gaganyaan.
- Two unmanned Gaganyaan missions will be undertaken prior to sending humans.
- The mission will aim to send a three-member crew to space for a period of five to seven days.
- The spacecraft will be placed in a low earth orbit of 300-400km.
- The total programme cost is expected to be less than Rs. 10,000 crores.
- With the ability to hold one oxygen cylinder, the suit will allow the astronaut to breathe in space for 60 minutes.
- The capsule will rotate around the Earth every 90 minutes, and astronauts will be able to witness sunrise and sunset.
- The three astronauts will be able to see India from space every 24 hours, while they conduct experiments on micro-gravity.
- For its return, the capsule will take 36 hours, and will land in the Arabian Sea, just off the coast of Gujarat.
- ISRO will receive assistance from the French space agency CNES, in terms of expertise various fields including space medicine, astronaut health monitoring, radiation protection and life support.

Objectives of the Mission-

- Enhancement of science and technology levels in the country
- A national project involving several institutes, academia and industry
- Improvement of industrial growth
- Inspiring youth
- Development of technology for social benefits
- Improving international collaboration

About GSLV Mk- III –

- It is a three-stage heavy-lift launch vehicle which will be used to launch Gaganyaan as it has the necessary payload capability.
- It is designed to carry 4 ton class of satellites into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) or about 10 tons to Low Earth Orbit (LEO).
- The powerful cryogenic stage of GSLV Mk III enables it to place heavy payloads into LEO's of 600 km altitude.
- The launcher uses two S200 solid rocket boosters to provide the huge amount of thrust required for lift off.

About ISRO-

- **Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)**, Indian space agency, founded in 1969 to develop an independent Indian space program. Its headquarter is in Bangalore (Bengaluru).
- Launch vehicles are developed at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre in Thiruvananthapuram. Launches take place at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre on Sriharikota Island, near Chennai.
- ISRO's first satellite, Aryabhata, was launched by the Soviet Union on April 19, 1975.
- Rohini, the first satellite to be placed in orbit by an Indian-made launch vehicle (the Satellite Launch Vehicle 3), was launched on July 18, 1980.
- ISRO has launched several space systems, including the Indian National Satellite (INSAT) system for telecommunication, television broadcasting, meteorology, and disaster warning and the Indian Remote Sensing (IRS) satellites for resource monitoring and management.
- The first INSAT was launched in 1988, and the program expanded to include geosynchronous satellites called GSAT.

© CONCLUSION

- Rs. 10,000-crore mission will be a turning point in India's space journey. The mission will enable ISRO to achieve higher levels of reliability in launch and satellite technology. It will help in providing employment to 15,000 people and out of them, 861 will be from Isro.

MISCELLANEOUS

CURRENT AFFAIRS

CENTRAL EQUIPMENT IDENTIFY REGISTER

- The government has launched a web portal, 'Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR)', to facilitate blocking and tracing of stolen/lost mobile phones in Delhi.
- At the launch, Minister for Communications, Law & Justice and Electronics & Information Technology said that mobile security should be a national priority because the mobile handset has become an important tool for all online activities.
- The web portal was first launched in Mumbai.
- The CEIR has been undertaken by the Department of Telecom (DoT) for addressing security, theft and other concerns including reprogramming of mobile handsets.
- The launch of the project in Delhi will facilitate – request for blocking of stolen or lost mobile phone by customers; blocking of such mobile phones across mobile networks; sharing of
- Traceability data with the Police; and unblocking of recovered/ found stolen or lost mobile phones.

DIVYANG FRIENDLY FEATURES IN BUSES

- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has notified for amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules for providing divyang friendly features in buses.
- The amendment provides for priority seats, signs, securing of crutches/canes/walkers, hand rail/stanchions, controls at priority seats and wheel chair entry/housing/locking arrangement for wheel chair for the divyangjan.
- Such facilities for differently abled passengers or passengers with reduced mobility will be checked and ensured at the time of Fitness Inspection for Buses.
- The amendment shall come into force on 1st March, 2020.
- The notification has been issued after duly considering the objections and suggestions received from public in respect of the said draft rules.

ISRO TO SET UP SECOND LAUNCH PORT

- Indian Space Research Organisation will establish a second launch port in Thoothukodi district in Tamil Nadu exclusively to launch small satellite launch vehicles.
- A second Vehicle Assembly Building in SDSC SHAR Sriharikota was dedicated to the nation during the year for increasing the launch frequency. As part of the enhanced outreach activity, a launch viewing gallery was operationalised in Sriharikota to facilitate viewing of launches live by the public.
- In an effort towards horizontal expansion of ISRO, Space Technology Cells, Space Technology Incubation Centres and Regional Academic Centres for Space were established during the year and many more such centres are planned in the future.
- To carry forward the industry production of space systems, ISRO incorporated New Space India Limited (NSIL), under the Department of Space and efforts in realising PSLVs from industry initiated.
- Other projects during the year include SSLV, GSLV with 4m ogive payload fairing, GSAT-20 satellite, NavIC with indigenous atomic clocks, Indian Data Relay Satellite System, Aditya-L1 and XPOSAT.

KRISHI KARMAN AWARDS

- The Prime Minister will distribute Krishi Karman Awards and Commendation Awards to states at a public meeting in Tumkur Karnataka.
- He will also give away Agriculture Minister's Krishi Karman Awards for Progressive Farmers.

- The event will also witness the release of the 3rd installment of PM Kisan (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi) of Rs 2000 for the period December 2019-March 2020.
- At the same event, Prime Minister will also handover the Keys of Deep Sea fishing Vessels and Fishing Vessel Transponders to select farmers of Tamil Nadu.

About Krishi Karman Awards

- These awards were instituted in 2010-11 for recognising the meritorious efforts of the states in food grains production.
- Krishi Karman awards are given to Best performer States for raising country's food grain production.
- The awards are given to the best performing States in two broad sets. One for total food grains production and the other for individual food grain crops of Rice, Wheat, Pulses and Coarse Cereals.
- Each award winning State gets a trophy, a citation and a cash award of Rs. 2 crore.
- For individual crops of Rice, Wheat, Pulses and Coarse Cereals, award winning States get a trophy, a citation and a cash award of Rs. 1 crore.

MANI APPLICATION OF RBI

- Reserve Bank of India, RBI has launched a mobile app, MANI, Mobile Aided Note Identifier, to help visually challenged people to identify denomination of currency notes.
- RBI said that the visually challenged can identify the denomination of a note by using the application, which can also work offline once it is installed.
- Through the downloaded app, users can scan the notes using the camera. The audio output will give the result in Hindi and English.
- The central bank has introduced several currency notes, under 'Mahatma Gandhi Series', with significant changes in the sizes and designs after the demonetization in November 2016.
- The RBI also said the app does not authenticate a note as either genuine or counterfeit.

POLITICAL PARTIES REGISTRATION TRACKING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (PPRTMS)

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) launched the Political Parties Registration Tracking Management System (PPRTMS) to help the applicants keep a track of their applications for the party registration from this year onwards.
- The salient feature in the PPRTMS is that the applicant, who is applying for party registration from January 1, 2020, will be able to track the progress of his or her application and will get the status update through SMS and e-mail.
- Registration of political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- The Commission in the month of December, 2019, has amended the guidelines registration of political party for the information of the general public. The new guidelines is effective from 1st January, 2020.

TEJAS EXPRESS

- After the successful run of Lucknow-Delhi Tejas Express, the second premium Tejas train is ready to run between Ahmedabad and Mumbai. This will be yet another step of the Ministry of Railways in its endeavour to improve the overall traveling experience to rail passengers by providing state of the art facilities.
- The inaugural run of this second Tejas Train will be flagged off from Ahmedabad on 17th January, 2020. The commercial run of the train will start with effect from 19th January, 2020 from Ahmedabad.

- The train to be operated by IRCTC which also operates the first Tejas Train, shall be equipped with all modern facilities on board for ensuring a high level of comfort to the passengers.

Salient features of the train are as under

- Complementary On board infotainment services will be available in IRCTC trains to the passengers.
- High quality food and beverages will be provided to the passengers on board in the train and included in the ticket fare.
- Service in the train will be done through trolleys similar to airlines. Each coach will be provided with RO water filter in addition to the packaged drinking water bottle for each passenger.
- All passengers travelling on IRCTC train will be provided with Rail Travel Insurance of up to Rs. 25 Lakhs, free of cost by IRCTC. This complimentary travel insurance also includes an exclusive coverage of Rs. 1 lakh against household theft / robbery during the travel period of the passengers.
- Besides, this special feature, in a first of its own, IRCTC will also pay a compensation of Rs. 100/- in case the train during its run, is delayed by more than one hour and Rs. 250/- in case of delay of more than two hours to every passenger as compensation.
- In case of cancellation of train, automatic full refund of full fare on confirmed and /or waitlisted e-tickets will be made. There will be no need of cancelling the ticket or filing TDR in such case
- There will be no tatkal quota or premium tatkal quota in the train. There will be only General Quota and Foreign Tourist Quota. Foreign Tourist Quota of 6 seats in EC and 12 seats in CC will be available for Foreign Tourists.

WORLD'S OLDEST RHINO' DIES IN TANZANIA

- A rhino believed to be the world's oldest has died at the age of 57 in a Tanzanian conservation area.
- Fausta, a female black rhino, died of natural causes in captivity on Friday in the Ngorongoro Crater.
- Records show that Fausta lived [longer] than any rhino in the world and survived in the Ngorongoro, free-ranging, for more than 54 years before it was kept in a sanctuary for the last three years of its life in 2016.
- Fausta was first located in 1965 when she was between three and four years old. Her health deteriorated after hyenas attacked her in 2016. She was subsequently taken into refuge.
- Rhinos' life expectancy is around 40 years in the wild, but they can live an extra decade in captivity.
- Decimated by poaching, black rhinos now number around 5500, according to charity Save The Rhino.
- The smaller of the two African species, they are found in southern and eastern Africa, including Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

YOUNG SCIENTISTS LABORATORIES

- In a boost to indigenous research capabilities in the defence sector, Prime Minister will dedicate Five DRDO Young Scientists Laboratories to the nation.
- The event shall be organised at the Aeronautical Development Establishment, DRDO at Bengaluru.
- The mission of the Young Scientist Lab is to foster a new generation of scientists who are inspired to improve the world with science.
- For teachers, students and parents seeking a place to explore the world of scientific innovations and opportunities, Discovery Education and 3M developed this interactive portal filled with engaging activities and standards-aligned teaching tools, anchored by the award-winning annual Young Scientist Challenge.
