

## Parliamentary Committee submitted report on Promotion of Electric Vehicles (EVs) in the Country

- An EV is propelled by an **electric motor**, powered by **rechargeable battery packs** (refer to box).
  - ⊕ Contrary to this an **Internal Combustion Engine (ICE)** generates power by burning a **mix of fuel and gases**.
- **Key issues highlighted**
  - ⊕ **Frequent changes in EV policies** create uncertainties in the market.
  - ⊕ **Lowering targets** under the **FAME-II** due to budgetary constraints.
    - ◆ FAME-II (under Ministry of Heavy Industries) focuses on **supporting electrification of public & shared transportation**.
  - ⊕ MoRTH issued guidelines to **States to encourage EV adoption**, lowering initial expenses.
    - ◆ Nevertheless, **exemptions and rebates for road tax** are currently available in **only 19 states/UTs**.
  - ⊕ **Lack of charging infrastructure** and the overall **time required to charge** such batteries is a **major hurdle in the adoption of EVs**.
- **Recommendations**
  - ⊕ Formulation of a stable **national policy on Electric Mobility**.
  - ⊕ Enhancement of **budgetary allocation** for e-Buses under FAME-II and **extend it for at least 3 more years** (current tenure 2019-2024).
  - ⊕ **Incentivize installation of charging stations** for individual investors.
    - ◆ **Women SHGs and Cooperative Societies** may be assisted to open and operate charging Stations.
  - ⊕ Establish **dedicated Manufacturing Hubs and Industrial Parks** for manufacturing of batteries, cells and EV auto components.
  - ⊕ Conduct a study regarding the **feasibility of battery standardisation**.

### Types of EVs

- **Battery BEVs/ All EVs:** Run entirely on a **battery-powered electric drive train**.
- **Hybrid EVs (HEVs):** Involving both the **engine and electric motor**, the transmission rotates concurrently driven by both power sources.
- **Plug-in HEVs:** Encompasses both an **engine and a motor** but its **battery pack is much larger** when compared to other HEVs.
- **Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles:** Referred to as **Zero-Emission Vehicles**, these vehicles utilize 'fuel cell technology' to generate electricity for propulsion.



## International Organisation for Migration (IOM) launches Project PRAYAS

- The **Project Promoting Regular Assisted Migration for Youth and Skilled Professionals (PRAYAS)**, was launched in **partnership with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** for the year **2023-24**.
  - ⊕ **Objective:** To facilitating **safe, orderly, and regular migration** for aspiring Indian migrant workers and students in collaboration with MEA, NITI Aayog, and State Governments.
  - ⊕ Project will **promote dissemination of communication materials** on safe and orderly migration pathways.
    - ◆ India has a large diaspora with **over 32 million** spread across the globe (2021 Dec).
    - ◆ Also, India is the **world's largest recipient of remittances**.
- **Problems faced by Indian diaspora abroad**
  - ⊕ **Wage insecurity, casual work arrangements, lack of social protection and skills gap**.
  - ⊕ Poor working conditions, absence of a proper **grievance redress mechanisms**, and access to a **transparent judicial system etc**.
- **Steps taken by India for diaspora**
  - ⊕ **Pre-Departure Orientation Training** is imparted to workers before they migrate.
  - ⊕ **Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF)** for assisting Overseas Indians in times of distress.
  - ⊕ **MADAD Portal** addresses grievances related to Indians in distress abroad.
  - ⊕ **Know India Programme** to expose India's young diaspora to various aspects of contemporary India.

### International Organisation for Migration (IOM)



-  **About:** Intergovernmental organization within United Nations system in the field of migration.
-  **Mandate:** Promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all.
-  **Member states:** 175 (including India)
-  **Major Reports:** World Migration Report
-  **Established:** 1951.

## ISRO has been awarded the 2023 Leif Erikson Lunar Prize for Chandrayaan-3

- It is an annual award given by Exploration Museum in Iceland's Husavik. It is dedicated to the history of human exploration, from the early explorers to the exploration of space.
  - ⊙ It is named after the Icelandic explorer Leif Erikson who is considered the first European to land in North America.
  - ⊙ The 2023 award celebrates first soft-landing of a spacecraft near lunar south-pole, which marked another major achievement for ISRO.
- **About Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO, HQ: Bengaluru)**
  - ⊙ ISRO, previously the Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR), was set up in 1962.
  - ⊙ Later, on August 15, 1969, ISRO superseded INCOSPAR and was subsequently brought under Dept of Space in 1972.
  - ⊙ **Role of ISRO in nation-building**
    - ◆ **Earth Observation, Meteorological Satellite Systems:** Supports disaster management, etc.
    - ◆ **Communication Satellite Systems:** INSAT satellites contributes significantly to socio-economic and strategic activities.
    - ◆ **Navigation Systems:** GPS Aided Geo Augmented Navigation (GAGAN) assists in civil aeronautical navigation.
    - ◆ **Capacity Building:** ISRO has transferred more than 363 technologies across India for commercialization, societal application, etc.
    - ◆ **Space Science and Planetary Research Systems:** Aditya-L1 project for understanding the Sun.
    - ◆ **Space Transportation System:** India has achieved self-reliance in space transportation capability via PSLV and GSLV.

## World Bank releases its annual International Debt Report (IDR), 2023

- The report analyses external debt statistics for 122 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).
- **Key highlights**
  - ⊙ **Historic rise in debt:** Public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt service payments by LMICs totaled US\$443.5 billion in 2022.
    - ◆ Over 1/3rd of such debt carries variable interest rates, posing risk of sudden increases.
  - ⊙ **Debt Service cost:** Due to rising interest rates and unfavourable exchange rate movement, servicing external debt could become burdensome.
    - ◆ India's debt service was 2% of the GNI in 2022.
  - ⊙ **Crowding out of priorities:** Debt servicing could crowd out spending on other development priorities (health, education, etc).
  - ⊙ **Outflow of money:** Due to a tighter monetary policy in advanced economies investors found attractive returns in US and European bond markets.
    - ◆ This led to a net outflow of US\$127.1 billion from LMICs.
- **Recommendations**
  - ⊙ **Portfolio analysis:** Closely scrutinize terms of debt instruments to identify risks and costs.
  - ⊙ **Debt buybacks:** To reduce a country's stock of nominal debt if the debt is trading at a deep discount.
  - ⊙ **Debt exchanges:** Swapping outstanding debt for new debt to lengthen the average maturity of the debt portfolio and reduce short-term maturities.
  - ⊙ **Debt-for-nature swaps:** To combine debt relief to participating sovereigns with partial earmarking of the freed-up resources for green projects.

### About external debt

- **External debt** refers to money borrowed from a source outside the country.
- It is a vital source to supplement the local revenue for development.
  - ⊙ However, it has to be paid back in the currency in which it is borrowed which enhances the debt vulnerability due to exchange rate fluctuations.

## Centre reconstituted National Startup Advisory Council (NSAC); nominated non-official members

- Upon completion of the two-year term of the NSAC, the Central Government nominated non-official members.
- **About NSAC**
  - ⊙ **Genesis:** NSAC was notified in 2020 by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
  - ⊙ **Aim:** To advise Government on fostering innovation and startups for sustainable economic growth and widespread employment.
  - ⊙ **Composition:** It consists of members from relevant line Ministries, Departments, and Organizations, as well as non-official members.
    - ◆ Non-official members include founders of successful startups, persons representing interests of investors, incubators and accelerators, etc.
    - ◆ Their term is two years or until further orders, whichever is earlier.
  - ⊙ **Headed by:** Union Minister of Commerce & Industry.
  - ⊙ **Key functions:** NSAC meets on a regular basis to suggest measures to:
    - ◆ Foster a culture of innovation amongst citizens and students.
    - ◆ Mobilize global capital for investments in Indian startups.
    - ◆ Keep control of startups with original promoters.
    - ◆ Provide access to global markets for Indian startups, etc.
  - ⊙ **Achievements:** Programs such as MAARG, National Mentorship Program, Adoption of NavIC Grand Challenge, Startup Champions 2.0 etc. are some of the programs ideated and incubated by NSAC.

### Other initiatives for Startups promotion

- **Startup India** to catalyse startup culture in India.
- **Fund of Funds for Startups Scheme** with corpus of Rs. 10,000 crore to meet funding needs of startups.
- **Scheme for Facilitating Start-Ups Intellectual Property Protection (SIPP)** to protect and promote Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of Startups
- **Mentorship, Advisory, Assistance, Resilience, and Growth (MAARG) programme**, virtual platform to mentor startups

## Lok Sabha passes Press and Registration of Periodicals (PRP) Bill to replace Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act, 1867

- The current PRB Act 1867 was aimed at curbing what the British Government **thought** was the role of the press in the “revolt of 1857”.
  - ⊖ It was introduced during the Viceroyship of Lord John Lawrence (1864-1869)

Basis of differentiation	PRB Act, 1867	PRP Bill, 2023
Registration of periodicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ Provides for the registration of newspapers, periodicals, and books.</li> <li>⊖ Provides for the cataloguing of books.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ It includes any publication containing <b>public news or comments on public news.</b></li> <li>⊖ Periodicals <b>do not include books or scientific and academic journals.</b></li> </ul>
Decriminalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ <b>Minor violations have provision of imprisonment up to six months.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ <b>Decriminalizes</b> violations under the Act.</li> <li>⊖ For certain violations, <b>financial penalties</b> have been proposed like publishing periodicals without registration.</li> </ul>
Registration of a printing press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ Requires a printing press to be declared before the DM.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ Allows for information regarding printing presses to be submitted through an <b>online portal.</b></li> </ul>
Appellate authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ No such appellate board.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ Provides for the <b>Press and Registration Appellate Board.</b></li> <li>⊖ <b>Aggrieved persons</b> can appeal to the board within <b>60 days.</b></li> </ul>
Suspend/cancel the Certificate of Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ <b>Only the DM</b> could cancel the declaration of a periodical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⊖ Empowers the <b>Press Registrar General</b> to suspend/cancel the Certificate of Registration.</li> </ul>

### Also in News



#### Parliament passes 3 Bills

- Both the Houses of the Parliament have passed following 3 bills:
  - ⊖ The **Post Office Bill, 2023** to ensure the effective functioning of the Postal Department
  - ⊖ The **Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Bill, 2023** provides for the appointment, salary, and removal of the CEC and ECs
  - ⊖ The **Telecommunications Bill, 2023** to regulate activities related to telecommunication
- For details kindly refer to the **News Today dated Dec 06, 2023; Dec 13, 2023; and Dec 19, 2023 (respectively).**



#### UNESCO's 2023 Prix Versailles

- **Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru** (Karnataka) was honored at UNESCO's 2023 **Prix Versailles**, and named among the 'World's most beautiful airports'.
- Granted annually at UNESCO since 2015, the **Prix Versailles consists of architecture awards that showcase the finest contemporary achievements worldwide.**
  - ⊖ The **Official list** align with the with the principles of **intelligent sustainability** and takes into consideration **projects' ecological, social and cultural impacts into consideration.**
  - ⊖ It highlights the **primary role of the Laureates in beautifying and improving the living environment.**



#### ECI guidelines on Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

- **The guidelines seek to nudge political parties** to move towards respectful discourse for PwDs and ensure their equal participation.
- **Key highlights**
  - ⊖ Any usage of derogatory references to PwDs may attract provisions of **Section 92 of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016.**
    - ◆ The Section discusses **punishment for atrocities** against PwD.
  - ⊖ All political parties shall use rights-based terminologies as mentioned in CRPD (**Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities**).
    - ◆ CPRD (**India is signatory**) aims to promote, ensure full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all PwDs.



#### Chilla-i-Kalan began in Kashmir

- Chilla-i-Kalan is a **Persian term** that means ‘**major cold**’ and it refers to the **40-days of harsh winter** in Kashmir.
  - ⊖ It begins from **December 21** and ends on **January 31**. Snow during the period **replenishes the streams, rivers, and lakes of Kashmir.**
- It is followed by a **20-day-long ‘Chillai Khurd or small cold (occurs between January 31 and February 19)’** and a **10-day-long ‘Chillai Bacha or baby cold (February 20 to March 2)’.**



### Black Tiger (Melanistic Tiger)

- According to Union government Melanistic tigers have been recorded **only in Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) in Odisha.**
  - ⊖ As per All India Tiger Estimation (2022), out of 16 tigers 10 were melanistic at STR.
  - ⊖ A **single mutation** in the gene **Transmembrane Aminopeptidase Q (Taqppep)** causes the **black tigers** to develop **broadened stripes.**
- STR harbours the **only population of melanistic tigers in the world.**
  - ⊖ It has been identified as a **distinct genetic cluster for conservation.**
  - ⊖ It receives funding assistance under **Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH).**



### Winter solstice 2023

- On December 22, the shortest day occurs when direct sunlight hits the **Tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere.**
- Earth's 23.5-degree tilt along with its spin, and orbit cause sunlight duration variations at different locations throughout the year.
  - ⊖ This lead to **Equinox** and **Solstice** phenomena
    - ◆ **Equinox:** When sun is directly over the equator and it occurs on **-21 March** and **23 September.**
    - ◆ **Solstice:** Two types-Winter and Summer Solstice
      - » **Summer Solstice:** 21st June when direct sunlight is over the **Tropic of cancer** in the Northern hemisphere.



### R21/Matrix-M malaria vaccine

- WHO prequalified the **second malaria vaccine R21/Matrix-M** (having 75% efficacy), developed by **Oxford University** and manufactured by the **Serum Institute of India.**
  - ⊖ This clears the way for countries to **buy the vaccine for a broader rollout.**
  - ⊖ **RTS,S/AS01 vaccine** was the **first vaccine** to obtained prequalification in 2022.
- **About Malaria**
  - ⊖ Malaria is caused by **5 Plasmodium parasite species** (2 of these species – P. falciparum and P. vivax – pose the greatest threat).
  - ⊖ **Plasmodium parasites** are spread to people through the bites of infected **female Anopheles mosquitoes.**



### White-bellied sea eagle (Ichthyophaga leucogaster)

- Bird which is common to coastal habitats was spotted unusually in Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu).
- **White-bellied sea eagle**
  - ⊖ **Geographic range:** They range north to south from southern China to Australia and Tasmania, and west to east from India to New Guinea.
  - ⊖ **Habitat:** Terrestrial habitats near the ocean, especially coasts, islands, and estuaries, etc.
  - ⊖ **Food Habits:** Feed on aquatic animals, especially fish, eels, and crustaceans, etc.
  - ⊖ **Threats:** Habitat destruction, hunting, and poisoning by pesticides
  - ⊖ **IUCN Status:** Least-concern



## Places in News



### Papua new Guinea ( Capital: Port Moresby)

- Recently \$1 million relief assistance announced by India for the volcanic eruption at Mount Ulawun affected people of Papua New Guinea.
- **Political features**
  - ⊖ It is an island country in the **southwestern Pacific Ocean.**
  - ⊖ Situated between the **Coral Sea** and the **South Pacific Ocean.**
  - ⊖ It has **Indonesia** in the west, **Australia** in the South, **Solomon Islands** in the East.
- **Geographical Features**
  - ⊖ **Highest point: Mount Wilhelm in the Bismarck Range**
  - ⊖ **Major Rivers:** Sepik, Ramu, Fly.



AHMEDABAD



BHOPAL



CHANDIGARH



DELHI



JAIPUR



JODHPUR



GUWAHATI



HYDERABAD



LUCKNOW



PRAYAGRAJ



PUNE



RANCHI



SIKAR