



PRS Capsule- September 2023

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Governance

Special Session 2023 of Parliament Held

- The [Special Session](#) of Parliament was held from September 18, 2023 to September 21, 2023, with four sittings.
- [The Constitution \(One Hundred and Twenty Eighth Amendment\) Bill, 2023](#) (Women's Reservation Bill), was introduced and passed during this session.
 - The Bill reserves one-third of all seats for women in [Lok Sabha](#), **state legislative assemblies, and the Legislative Assembly of Delhi.**
- **Key Features of the Bill:**
 - The reservation will be effective **after the census** conducted after the commencement of this Bill has been published.
 - Based on the census, delimitation will be undertaken to reserve seats for women. **The reservation will be provided for a period of 15 years.**
 - However, it shall continue till such date as determined by a law made by Parliament.
 - Seats reserved for women **will be rotated after each delimitation**, as determined by a law made by Parliament.

▪ **Issues to Consider:**

- The issue of reservation of seats for women in legislatures can be examined from three perspectives:
 - whether the policy of reservation for women **can act as an effective instrument for their empowerment**
 - whether alternate methods of **increasing representation of women** in legislatures are feasible
 - whether **there are any issues with the proposed method** for reservation in the Bill.

▪ **Pros and Cons of Reservation in Political Parties and Dual member Constituencies:**

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide more democratic choice to voters. ▪ Allow more flexibility to parties to choose candidates and constituencies depending on local political and social factors. ▪ Can nominate women from minority communities in areas where this will be an electoral advantage. ▪ Allow flexibility in the number of women in Parliament. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No guarantee that a significant number of women would get elected. ▪ Political parties may assign women candidates to constituencies where they are weak. ▪ Might lead to resentment if a woman is accommodated to the disadvantage of a stronger male candidate.
Dual- member Constituencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not decrease the democratic choice for voters. ▪ Does not discriminate against male candidates. ▪ Might make it easier for members to nurture constituencies whose average size is about 2.5 million people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sitting members may have to share their political base. ▪ Women may become secondary persons or add-ons. ▪ To fulfil the criteria of 33% women, half of the seats need to be dual constituencies. This would increase the total number of Member of Parliaments (MPs) by 50%, which could make deliberation in Parliament more difficult.

- Bills amending the Constitution to reserve seats for women in Parliament and state legislative assemblies **have been introduced in 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2008.**
 - The **first three Bills** lapsed with dissolution of their respective Lok Sabhas.
 - The **2008 Bill** was introduced in and passed by [Rajya Sabha](#) but it also lapsed with the dissolution of the **15th Lok Sabha.**
- **Key Changes Between 2008 Bill and Bill Introduced in 2023:**

	Bill Introduced in 2008 as Passed by Rajya Sabha	Bill Introduced in 2023
Reservation in Lok Sabha	One-third of Lok Sabha seats in each state/UT to be reserved for women.	One-third seats to be reserved for women.
Rotation of Seats	Reserved seats to be rotated after	Reserved seats to be rotated

every general election to Parliament/legislative assembly.

after every **delimitation** exercise.

▪ **Other Bills Taken Up for Discussion During Special Session:**

- [The Repealing and Amending Bill, 2022](#)
- [The Inter-State River Water Disputes \(Amendment\) Bill, 2019](#)
- **The Advocates (Amendment) Bill, 2023**
- **The Press and Registration of Periodicals (Amendment) Bill, 2023**

Central Government Constitutes Committee on Simultaneous Elections

▪ **About:**

- The central government constituted a **High-Level Committee** to examine and make recommendations on holding [Simultaneous elections](#).
 - **Simultaneous elections** refer to the elections of Lok Sabha, State Legislatures, and local bodies being conducted at the same time.

▪ **Members of the Committee:**

- The Committee shall comprise a former [President](#) as Chairman and **has seven members**. The members of the Committee include:
 - **Minister of Home Affairs**
 - **Former Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission**

▪ **Terms of Reference:**

- The Committee will review and suggest changes to laws and regulations related to holding simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies.
 - These changes may **include amendments to the Constitution, the [Representation of the People Act, 1950](#), and the [Representation of the People Act, 1951](#).**
- The Committee will also examine whether the Constitutional amendments will require ratification by states.
- The Committee will also:
 - Suggest a **framework for synchronising elections**,
 - **Recommend safeguards** to ensure the continuity of the cycle of simultaneous elections,
 - Examine the logistical and manpower requirements, and
 - Recommend the modalities for the use of a single electoral roll and identity cards for voters in different elections.

Cabinet Approves eCourts Phase-III

▪ **About:**

- The Union Cabinet approved Phase III of the [eCourts Project](#) as a [central sector scheme](#) from 2023 to 2027.

▪ **eCourts Project :**

- **The eCourts project was initiated in 2007** to digitally enable the Indian judiciary. **Phase-II of the scheme concluded in 2023.**
- **Phase-I** of the scheme led to the computerization of a large number of district courts.
- Further, **Phase-II** of the scheme **aimed to provide service delivery to citizens**, such as accessible websites in local languages.

▪ **Objective of Phase-III:**

- Providing judicial services to citizens without technology access **via [eSewa Kendras](#)**.
- Enabling payment of courts fees and fines from anywhere.
- Minimising reliance on paper-based court filings.
- Approximately **28% of the budgetary outlay is estimated to be spent on scanning, digitisation**, and digital preservation of case records, while about 17% is estimated to be spent on cloud infrastructure.

Law Commission Submits Report on Age of Consent under POCSO Act

- **About:**
 - Under the [Protection of Children from Sexual Offences \(POCSO\) Act](#), **a child is defined as anyone under 18 years old**. The Act criminalises sexual relations with a child irrespective of his or her consent.
- **Key Observations and Recommendations of the Commission:**
 - **Age of Consent:**
 - The Commission recommended **against reducing the age of consent under the POCSO Act to 16 years**.
 - **Child Above 16 years:**
 - The commission states that a lower sentence may be imposed on the accused **if the child was 16 years or above at the time of the offence**. This would require certain criteria to be satisfied. These include:
 - **Special Court** being satisfied that the relationship between the accused and child was intimate
 - Presence of tacit approval from the child
 - An **age difference of not more than three years** between the accused and the child
 - **No criminal history** of the accused
 - No element of undue influence, force, or violence being present
 - The accused are not in a dominating position to intimidate the child and the parents.
 - **The Indian Penal Code (IPC):**
 - Currently, under the [Indian Penal Code \(IPC\)](#), consensual sex between a husband and his wife (**who is below 18 years**) will amount to rape.
 - The Commission noted that **solely amending the POCSO Act to provide relief for adolescent romantic relationships would be meaningless** without amending the IPC.
 - Therefore, the Commission recommended carrying out suitable amendments to the IPC.

Law Commission Report on Enabling Online Registration of FIR Under CrPC

- The Law Commission submitted its report on “Amendment in **Section 154 of The Code** of Criminal Procedure, 1973 for Enabling Online Registration of [First Information Report \(FIR\)](#)”.
- The Commission noted that **eight states**, including Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, have implemented the registration of e-FIRs.
- Further, citizens can lodge online complaints regarding cyber-crime.
- The Commission recommended a phased implementation of e-FIRs.
 - It recommended **enabling e-FIRs** for all cognisable offences where the accused is not known and cognisable offences punishable **with imprisonment up to three years**, where the accused is known.
 - The Commission also highlighted that the **data provided while registering e-FIRs should not be compromised**.

Standing Committee Report on Prison Conditions, Infrastructure, and Reforms

- **Key Observations and Recommendations of the Committee:**
 - **Overcrowding:**
 - The Committee observed that [overcrowded prisons](#) have serious consequences for both prisoners and the criminal justice system. The national average occupancy rate in prisons across India is **130%**.
 - The Committee recommended **transferring prisoners from overcrowded jails to other jails** within the same state or in other states by signing a Memorandum of Understanding.
 - **Young Offenders:**
 - The Committee noted that there is a **lack of clarity on who is a young offender** across states.
 - It recommended that the Ministry of Home Affairs should provide a clear definition of young offenders along with a common guideline to all states/UTs.

- **Women Prisoners:**
 - The Committee recommended **giving special attention to pregnant women**, including the ability to give birth outside prison and proper prenatal and postnatal care.
 - To ensure a nurturing environment for the children, the Committee recommended allowing babies born in prison **to stay with their mothers till the age of 12 years.**

Standing Committee Submits Report on Implementation of NEP in Higher Education

- **The [National Education Policy \(NEP\), 2020](#)** outlines revisions in the structure and objectives of India's education system. These include **introducing a five-stage design** for the school system and encouraging multidisciplinary education.
- **Observations and Recommendations of the Committee :**
 - **Interdisciplinary and personalised learning:**
 - It noted the '**Design your Degree**' programme launched by Jammu University, which is based on the [Choice-Based Credit System](#) outlined in the NEP.
 - The programme offers students the choice to pursue interdisciplinary and personalized learning. The Committee recommended introducing this programme in other institutions.
 - **Digital libraries:**
 - The Committee observed that **digital libraries** can provide students and educators convenient access to a vast range of learning resources.
 - It recommended the **Department of Higher Education** to ensure the availability of content in regional languages for better reach and learning outcomes.
 - **Marginalised students:**
 - The Committee noted a **gap between the [Gross Enrolment Ratio \(GER\)](#) of students from SC and ST communities** and the overall GER, between 2016- 17 to 2020-21.
 - The Committee recommended specific measures to further improve higher educational access for students hailing from these marginalized communities. **These include:**
 - conducting targeted awareness campaigns
 - developing infrastructure in remote areas and urban slums
 - providing specialized training for teachers working in marginalized communities
 - offering scholarships suited to the needs of marginalized communities.
 - It also recommended putting in place a transparent and efficient hiring process for teachers that prioritizes diversity.

Bharat New Car Assessment Programme for Assessing Crash Safety of Cars Notified

- The Ministry of Road Transport and Highway notified amendments to the [Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989](#). The Rules have been **framed under the provisions of the [Motor Vehicles Act, 1988](#).**
- The amendments introduce the [Bharat New Car Assessment Program \(BNCAP\)](#) for assessing the safety rating of vehicles under the **M1 category**.
 - The **M1 category** consists of cars weighing **up to 3.5 tonnes** and can carry up to eight passengers (excluding the driver).
- The vehicles will be examined and assessed for star rating in accordance with [Automotive Industry Standard \(AIS\) 197](#).
 - **As per draft AIS 197 (yet to be notified)**, the overall vehicle safety assessment will be based on:
 - **adult** occupant protection
 - **child** occupant protection
 - **safety** assist technologies

- The program will be applicable for vehicles from **October 1, 2023**.

Standing Committee Submits Report on Functioning of Archaeological Survey of India

- An Inland waterway is a **navigable river and canal system**. The **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** regulates and develops national waterways for inland shipping and navigation.
- **Key Observations and Recommendations of the Committee include:**
 - The Committee recommended that the **list of these monuments be rationalized** based on national significance, unique architectural value, and specific heritage content.
 - It also observed that **50 centrally protected monuments** remain untraceable or are affected by rapid urbanization.
 - It recommended the [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) to ensure the **physical security of all monuments** maintained by it and identified lack of personnel to be a key gap in ensuring security.
 - **Restricted Areas Around Monuments:**
 - Within the radius of **300 metres of archaeological sites**, various activities including construction and mining are restricted under law.
 - The Committee observed that this invites public criticism and inconvenience, as in some cases, an entire village is covered within such radius. It **recommended that these restrictions should be rationalized**.

Economy

Current Account Deficit at 1.1% of GDP in the First Quarter of 2023-24

- **Current Account:**
 - The [current account](#) recorded a **deficit of USD 9.2 billion (1.1% of GDP)** in the first quarter (April-June) of 2023-24, significantly lower than the deficit of USD 17.9 billion (2.1% of GDP) in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23.
 - In the same period, merchandise trade deficit narrowed from USD 63.1 billion to USD 56.6 billion.
 - [Current account deficit](#) was USD **1.3 billion (0.2% of GDP)** in the fourth quarter (January-March) of 2022-23.
- **Capital Account:**
 - [Capital Account](#) registered a net inflow of USD 34.4 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24 as compared to a net inflow of USD 22.1 billion in the corresponding quarter of 2022-23.
 - [Foreign portfolio investments](#) registered a net inflow of USD 15.7 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24 as compared to a net outflow of USD 14.6 billion in the first quarter of 2022-23.
 - In the fourth quarter of 2022-23, the **capital account had registered a net inflow of USD 6.5 billion**.
- **Foreign Exchange Reserves**
 - It increased by USD 24.4 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24, **significantly higher than an increase of USD 4.6 billion in the same quarter in 2022**.

RBI Releases Directions on Investment Portfolio of Commercial Banks

- **About:**
 - The [Reserve Bank of India \(RBI\)](#) released the RBI (Classification, Valuation and Operation of Investment Portfolio of Commercial Banks) Directions, 2023.
 - The framework **will be applicable for all commercial banks, excluding regional rural banks, from April 1, 2024**.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Investment Policy Framework:** Banks must adopt an investment policy approved by their boards. The policy must include:
 - Investment criteria and objectives to be achieved through investment transactions,
 - Securities in which banks can invest.
 - **Categorisation of Investments:** Investment portfolio of banks must be categorized into:

- **Held to maturity** (securities acquired with the intention of holding them to maturity)
- **Available for sale** (securities acquired for collecting cash flows as well as sale)
- **Fair value through profit and loss** (securities that do not fall in the above two categories).
- **Internal control system:** Banks must have a robust internal control mechanism for investment transactions. This includes:
 - Periodic reconciliation of the investment book
 - Valuation of portfolios
 - Monitoring of prudential and risk limits

RBI Issues Directions on Release of Property Documents on Repayment of Personal Loans

- The **RBI** issued directions for the release of movable/immovable property documents by regulated entities (such as banks) upon the repayment of personal loans.
 - **Personal loans** include education loans, housing loans, and loans for investments in financial assets.
- RBI has **observed divergent practices** in the release of such documents.
 - The directions require regulated entities to release the original property documents **within 30 days after the full repayment/settlement of the loan account.**
 - In case of any delay caused by the regulated entity, a compensation of **Rs 5,000** will be paid for each day of delay to the borrower. These directions will be applicable **from December 1, 2023.**

RBI Issues Draft Directions for Treatment of Wilful and Large Defaulters

- **About:**
 - The **RBI** issued the [draft RBI \(Treatment of Wilful Defaulters and Large Defaulters\) Directions, 2023](#) for public feedback. The draft directions seek to provide a procedure for classification of a borrower as wilful defaulter by lenders.
- **Key Features:**
 - **Wilful Defaulter:**
 - **It refers to:**
 - A borrower or guarantor who has committed [wilful default](#) of **at least Rs 25 lakh or as notified by RBI**
 - Promoters and Directors associated at the time of default if the defaulter is a company
 - Persons in charge of and responsible for management of the affairs of an entity.
 - **Identification of Wilful Defaulters:**
 - The evidence of wilful default will be examined by an **identification committee** (consisting of a wholetime director as chairperson and two senior officials) set up by the lender.
 - If the committee is satisfied that wilful default has occurred, it will issue a show-cause notice to the borrower.
 - **Measures Against Wilful Defaulters:**
 - Lenders may initiate criminal proceedings against wilful defaulters, if warranted. **Wilful defaulters will not be eligible for restructuring of the credit facility.**

Comments Invited on Guidelines for Regulating Dark Patterns in E-commerce

- **About:**
 - [Dark patterns](#) refer to practices or deceptive **design patterns in User Interfaces (UI)** of platforms, designed to mislead or trick users into performing unintended actions.
 - These patterns impair consumer autonomy, decision making or choice, and amount to misleading or unfair trade practices.
- **Key Features of the Draft Guidelines:**

- **Engaging in dark patterns prohibited:**
 - **These will apply to** all platforms offering goods or services in India Advertisers, and sellers.
- **[The Central Consumer Protection Authority \(CCPA\)](#)**, established under the **[Consumer Protection Act, 2019](#)** will be responsible for settling ambiguities or disputes related to the interpretation of dark patterns.
 - Under the Act, failure to comply with the direction of the CCPA **is punishable with imprisonment up to six months, a fine of up to Rs 20 lakh, or both.**

Standing Committee Submits its Report on the National Inland Waterways

- An Inland waterway is a navigable river and canal system. [The Inland Waterways Authority of India \(IWAI\)](#) regulates and develops national waterways for inland shipping and navigation.
- **Key Observations and Recommendations of the Committee :**
 - **Operationalisation of National Waterways:**
 - There are [111 notified national waterways](#), **out of which 23 have been made operational.**
 - The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways stated that the development of 63 **national waterways** has not taken up due to financial and staffing constraints.
 - The Committee also recommended **against taking up development of these 63 waterways** at present, as they are unviable.
 - **Intermodal Connectivity for Cargo Movement:**
 - The Committee noted that connectivity of waterways with major ports, rails and roads would lessen the burden on these modes and reduce the logistics costs.
 - **Low Modal Share of Waterways:**
 - The modal share of waterways in India's freight movement is about **2%, whereas the corresponding figure is 4% for USA, 14% for China, 48% for Vietnam, and 49% for Netherlands.**
 - **India aims to increase the modal share to 5% by 2030.**
 - The **Committee recommended** the Ministry to come up with an action plan to harness the potential of waterways as a sustainable transit option and tourism product.

Rules on Captive Power Generators and Users Amended

- **About:**
 - A **captive generation plant is a power plant set up for one's own use.** The amendments require the verification of certain captive generation plants and alter the definition of captive users.
- **Key Features of the Amended Rules:**
 - **Change in definition of captive users:**
 - The amendment broadens the scope of entities considered to be captive users. Previously, the Rules specified that affiliate companies (in which the captive user **held at least 51% ownership**) **would be considered as captive users.**
 - The amended Rules have replaced the term affiliate company with holding company which is defined in the [Companies Act, 2013](#).
 - **Verification of certain captive generation plants:**
 - The amendment requires that the captive status of certain generating plants shall be verified by the [Central Electricity Authority](#).
 - This only applies to generating plants in which the captive user(s) and its captive generating plant are located in more than one state

Rules for Auction of Mining Lease and Composite License Amended

- **About:**
 - The Ministry of Mines notified amendments to the **Mineral (Auction) Rules, 2015**. The Rules have been framed under the [Mines and Minerals \(Development and Regulation\) Act, 1957](#).

- The Act regulates the mining sector in India. The **2015 Rules** prescribe the procedure of conducting auction of mines.
- **Key Features of the Amended Rules:**
 - **Concessions for critical and strategic minerals:**
 - The amended Rules introduce certain **requirements for the state government with regard to concessions for critical and strategic minerals**. These minerals are specified in the First Schedule of the Act, and include [lithium](#)- bearing minerals and graphite.
 - **Classification of land:**
 - **Under the 2015 Rules**, the state government may hold an auction for granting a mining lease in an area with established mineral contents.
 - Before the auction, the state government must identify and mark the area using surveying equipment. The area should be categorised as:
 - forest land
 - land owned by the state government
 - land not owned by the state government.
 - The **amended Rules** provide that for this purpose, state governments may use land details available in:
 - **Portal of the [PM Gati Shakti](#)**
 - [Land record](#) portal of the state government
 - Records of any other government authority

Standing Committee Submits Report on the Employees State Insurance Corporation

- **About:**
 - The [Employees State Insurance Act, 1948](#) mandates employers to contribute towards medical care to employees. It applies to factories **employing at least 10 persons**.
 - The central and state governments have also **included shops, hotels, cinemas, newspaper establishments, and port trusts under their purview**.
 - The Act establishes the [Employees State Insurance Corporation \(ESIC\)](#) and **Employees State Insurance Scheme (ESI Scheme)**.
- **Key Observations and Recommendations of the Committee:**
 - **Revision of wage limit for coverage under the ESI scheme:**
 - Employees **earning up to Rs 176 per day** are exempted from paying contributions. The Committee noted that this ceiling has remained unchanged for about seven years.
 - The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Labour and Employment should revise provisions related to coverage and contribution of wages.
 - **Expansion of Coverage of Scheme:**
 - The **ESI Act, 1948** has been subsumed in the [Code on Social Security, 2020](#). The Committee noted that with the implementation of the Code, ESI will expand to include:
 - Voluntary coverage for establishments **with less than 10 persons**
 - Mandatory coverage for establishments engaged in a hazardous occupation
 - Provisions for formulating special schemes for unorganised workers, gig workers, and platform workers.
 - The Committee noted the lack of readiness of the **Ministry and ESIC** in providing the extended coverage.
 - It **recommended carrying out comprehensive surveys, data collection, and use of [Aadhaar](#)** to identify eligible insured persons.

Environment

Extended Producer Responsibility Rules for Used Oil Notified

- **About:**
 - The Rules have been framed under the [Environment Protection Act, 1986](#). The Rules were

enacted to reduce hazardous waste generation and set up measures for recycling such waste.

- The amendment adds [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\)](#) to manage used oil, which requires producers to recycle such used oil.
 - Used oil refers to **oil derived from crude oil or mixtures containing synthetic oil, and oils suitable for reprocessing.**
 - The EPR applies to producers who manufacture and/or sell base oil/ lubrication oil.
- **Key Features of the Amendments:**
 - **Management of used oil:**
 - As per the amended Rules, used oil will be managed through:
 - **producing re-refined base oil/lubrication oil**
 - **energy recovery**, i.e., utilising used oil as fuel.
 - **EPR targets:**
 - It is now the **responsibility of the producer to recycle used oil** through registered recyclers to ensure environmentally sound management of used oil.
 - The Rules specify **targets based on yearly sales/imports** of base oil/lubrication oil to fulfil these obligations.
 - Producers may take help from third-party organisations, such as dealers to meet the targets.
 - **Producer responsibility certificates:**
 - **Producers may fulfil their EPR by purchasing certificates** from registered recyclers of used oil.
 - **Recycling refers to re-refining used oil or energy recovery from used oil.** Certificates can also be purchased based on the producer's current and previous years' liability.
 - **Registration:**
 - The amendments **mandate producers, collection agents, recyclers, and used oil importers** to register themselves with the [Central Pollution Control Board \(CPCB\)](#).
 - **Non-compliance:**
 - In case of non-fulfilment of obligations, environmental compensation can be imposed by CPCB.
 - Entities can be prosecuted for furnishing false information. The Rules also establish a **Steering Committee, headed by the CPCB Chairperson, to oversee implementation.**

Framework for Promoting Energy Storage Systems Released

- **About:**
 - India targets to have **50% cumulative installed capacity from [non-fossil energy sources by 2030](#)**. Energy storage systems will be crucial for integration of renewable energy capacity at this scale.
- **The Framework Recommends Key Measures:**
 - **Regulatory measures:**
 - It recommends **framing power purchase guidelines** to incentivise energy storage systems.
 - Providing energy storage systems with [carbon credits](#) where they utilise [Renewable Energy \(RE\)](#) for charging.
 - New RE projects **over 5 megawatts** should be required to install energy storage systems **for at least 5%** of their renewable energy capacity.
 - **Technology-agnostic bidding:**
 - The competitive bidding guidelines for projects should not give preferential treatment to certain technologies.
 - **Recycling and sustainability:**
 - All bidding documents should have an end-of-life management plan. These plans should promote repurposing or reusing old batteries.
 - **Financial incentives:**
 - Viability gap funding **up to 40% of the capital cost** for the battery energy storage systems should be provided (provided that the project is commissioned

within 18-24 months).

- [Production linked Incentive \(PLI scheme\)](#) should be formulated for incentivising domestic manufacturing of energy storage systems and ancillary components.

Rules to Increase the Validity of Fitness Certificates for Transport Vehicles Notified

- The Rules have been framed under the provisions of the [Motor Vehicles Act, 1988](#). The 1988 Act **empowers the central government to prescribe rules for issuing fitness certificates to transport vehicles.**
- A fitness certificate is proof that the vehicle is safe and fit for use on the road.
- **New Rules Notified:**
 - **Under the 1989 Rules**, the validity of the fitness certificate for old transport vehicles was **one year.**
 - The Amendments **increase the validity period to two years** for vehicles up to **eight years old.**
 - Only automated testing stations should issue fitness certificates for
 - heavy goods vehicles
 - heavy passenger motor vehicles
 - medium goods vehicles
 - light motor.
- **The new rules will apply from October 1, 2024.**

Standing Committee Report on Development of Niche Tourism and Potential Tourist Spots

- **About:**
 - Niche tourism caters to small groups of people sharing similar interests. It includes rural tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, and medical tourism.
- **Rural Tourism:**
 - The Committee observed that no Indian village features in the list of the best tourism villages prepared by the [United Nations World Tourism Organisation](#).
 - It further observed that rural tourism has immense potential for boosting employment and income for villagers.
 - It recommended that the website on **rural tourism must provide details of rural homestays, travel connectivity**, and tourist spots in villages.
- **Adventure Tourism:**
 - The Committee **observed that there has been an increase in the number of accidents in adventure sports.**
 - It noted the **presence of unlicensed adventure** tour operators.
 - The Committee recommended that the Ministry of Tourism should enact a law so that only licensed operators provide adventure tourism services.
- **Medical Tourism:**
 - The Committee observed that **lack of regulations in the medical travel sector** affects monitoring of the quality of services offered.
 - They recommended **all medical tourism facilitators to mandatorily register** with the government.
 - It also recommended the Ministry to encourage hospitals to obtain the Joint Commission International accreditation as it is recognised on an international level.
- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme:**
 - Under [Swadesh Darshan Scheme](#), **15 thematic circuits** have been identified. **76 projects** have been sanctioned in **31 states/UTs** for the development of tourism infrastructure.
 - The Committee noted that several projects are delayed due to lack of approvals from temple or forest authorities.
 - It recommended monitoring the real time progress of the projects.

