

# THE ROAD TO E-VEHICLES

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development & EIA

Jharkhand Chief Minister Raghubar Das recently announced that his government has introduced electric vehicles for official use. While 20 vehicles have been acquired for the first phase, another 30 are expected to be added to the fleet in the coming weeks. It has also been reported that 12 charging stations have been set up in Ranchi so far, and several more are slated to come up.

In the current scenario of soaring fuel prices and the spectre of climate change looming large over the planet, it is a welcome development that a State government is taking the lead in switching to e-vehicles. Not only does this reduce the burden of fuel bills on the exchequer, it is also in sync with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strong pitch in favour of electric vehicles at the recently held Global Mobility Summit in New Delhi. "Clean mobility powered by clean energy is our most powerful weapon in our fight against climate change," Mr. Modi had said as he batted for investments in electric vehicles and charging stations.

In this context, it is well known that government officials are tremendous guzzlers of fossil fuel. If ministers and politicians are taken as a single category of consumers, their per capita and per kilometre consumption of fossil fuel is likely to be many times higher than that of most ordinary users, given their penchant for moving around accompanied by lengthy convoys of gas-guzzling escort vehicles.

One might expect that in a real democracy, public servants, with some exceptions, would typically use public transport, which also happens to be another thrust area identified by the Prime Minister as integral to the future of mobility in India. But if this is too unrealistic an expectation, the least they could do is to exchange their petroleum-based vehicles for electric ones.

If other States and the Centre were to follow the example set by Jharkhand, it would have two positive spin-offs: first, it would encourage the spread of a transportation infrastructure specific to e-vehicles; and second, it would spur the early adoption of e-vehicles by first-time buyers, generating consumer momentum for India's stated goal of ensuring that by 2030, all public transport and 30% of private vehicles are electric. This is not far-fetched as quite a few countries, such as Norway and France, already have a substantial percentage of their vehicles running on either electricity or alternate fuels.

Electric vehicles are also an integral component of smart cities, as they are an automatic assumption in frameworks of smart transportation. Meanwhile, the government needs to speed up the formulation of rules for e-vehicles as a category, and come up with an India-specific road map for a transition that needs to be smooth if only because it is inevitable.

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