

India may open up lithium mining in batteries quest

Mulls changing laws to allow production by private companies

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India is seeking to change laws to allow private miners to extract lithium, the key ingredient for batteries used in in electric vehicles and energy storage, as the nation aims to be more self-sufficient in green technologies.

The Centre wants lawmakers' approval for amendments to existing policies in the current session of Parliament, according to people familiar with the plans. Eight minerals, including lithium, beryllium and zirconium will be removed from a restricted list that currently prohibits production by private companies.

The changes will allow the government to auction permits to exploit lithium reserves, the people said, asking not to be named as the matter is not yet public.

They are also aimed at reducing India's dependence on imports for some key minerals, and to put the country in a better position to compete in the lucrative battery supply chain.

A Ministry of Mines spokesperson didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Carbon neutral goal

India wants to add local manufacturing of a swathe of zero-emissions technologies as it chases a target of becoming carbon neutral by 2070 and to capture opportunities from the global transition to cleaner energy.

The nation has pledged to build 500 gigawatts of clean power capacity by



Agencies prospecting for lithium have discovered a small resource in Karnataka **BLOOMBERG**

2030, and the deployment of huge volumes of battery storage is seen as vital to enable round-the-clock use of renewables.

Government agencies have been exploring for lithium and discovered a small resource at a site in Karnataka, according to the Ministry of Mines. Still, to produce lithium at any meaningful scale and reduce reliance on imports, India would need to find

and develop further deposits.

Jump in imports

Australia and Chile currently dominate raw materials output, while China is the world's largest refiner.

India's imports of lithium-ion batteries jumped 54 per cent from a year earlier to \$1.83 billion in the year ended March, Trade Ministry data show.

Almost 87 per cent of the purchases came from China and Hong Kong, despite India's efforts to shun imports from its northern neighbour.

Besides effort to boost local output, the country is also scouting for lithium and cobalt assets overseas. A joint venture has been formed with three state companies — National Aluminium Co, Hindustan Copper Ltd. and Mineral Exploration Corp — to acquire mines overseas.