DGFT bans export of lithium-ion battery waste ('black mass')

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News

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), under the Union Commerce Ministry, prohibited with immediate effect the export of unsorted battery waste and scrap free of lead, cadmium and mercury – identified as lithium-ion battery 'black mass', the powder obtained by shredding spent cells. By a notification dated 10 November 2026, the export policy of ITC(HS) code 85491400 was changed from 'Free' to 'Prohibited' until further orders. It was issued under Sections 3 and 5 of the Foreign Trade (Development & Regulation) Act, 1992 and the Foreign Trade Policy 2023. Black mass contains critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese and graphite, which can be recovered by hydrometallurgy. The Commerce Ministry said the move aims to strengthen domestic recycling and critical-mineral recovery and cut import dependence. It complements the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM). The ban does not cover all batteries.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Notification	DGFT notification, 10 November 2026 (announced 11 Nov)
Item	Li-ion battery black mass – ITC(HS) 85491400
Change	'Free' → 'Prohibited' (until further orders)
Legal basis	FT(D&R) Act 1992, Sections 3 & 5; Foreign Trade Policy 2023

Point	Details
Minerals	Lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite
Aim	Domestic recycling, critical-mineral recovery, lower import dependence
Linked scheme	National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM, 2025)
Rules	Battery Waste Management Rules, 2022 (MoEFCC)

Background

- Administration: DGFT functions under the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry; HQ New Delhi. The Foreign Trade (Development & Regulation) Act, 1992 empowers the Centre to frame export–import policy. The Foreign Trade Policy 2023, in force from 1 April 2023, has no end date.
- Environmental law: The Battery Waste Management Rules, 2022 were notified in August 2022 by the Union Environment Ministry under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. The international treaty controlling transboundary movement of hazardous wastes is the Basel Convention (1989, Switzerland); India is a party.
- Geography & economy: In February 2023 the Geological Survey of India (GSI) reported 5.9 million tonnes of inferred lithium resources in the Salal–Haimana area of Reasi district, Jammu and Kashmir – a first for the country. India depends heavily on imports for critical minerals; recovering them from spent batteries ('urban mining') is part of the circular economy.
- Science: Lithium is the lightest metal (atomic number 3). John Goodenough, Stanley Whittingham and Akira Yoshino won the 2019 Chemistry Nobel for developing the lithium-ion battery. During charging, lithium ions move from the cathode to the (graphite) anode.

Tamil Nadu link: Ola Electric's lithium-ion cell gigafactory is in Krishnagiri district; the Hosur–Krishnagiri belt is growing into an EV manufacturing hub.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), under the Union Commerce Ministry, prohibited with immediate effect the export of unsorted battery waste and scrap free of lead, cadmium and mercury – identified as lithium-ion battery 'black mass', the powder obtained by shredding spent cells.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Notification: DGFT notification, 10 November 2026 (announced 11 Nov); Item: Li-ion battery black mass – ITC(HS) 85491400; Change: 'Free' → 'Prohibited' (until further orders); Legal basis: FT(D&R) Act 1992, Sections 3 & 5; Foreign Trade Policy 2023.

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Practice questions (with answers)

1. The DGFT, which banned the export of lithium-ion battery black mass, works under which ministry?

A) Commerce & Industry

B) Finance

C) External Affairs

D) Mines

Answer: A – Explanation: Ministry of Commerce & Industry – Department of Commerce. Customs duty is collected by the Finance Ministry's CBIC.

2. Which law empowers the Centre to frame export–import policy and impose bans like this one?

A) Customs Act, 1962

B) FT(D&R) Act, 1992

C) FEMA, 1999

D) EP Act, 1986

Answer: B – Explanation: Foreign Trade (Development & Regulation) Act, 1992 – Sections 3 and 5. FEMA regulates foreign exchange.

3. Which international convention controls the cross-border movement of hazardous wastes such as battery waste?

A) Basel

B) Rotterdam

C) Stockholm

D) Minamata

Answer: A – Explanation: Basel (1989) – hazardous waste. Rotterdam – prior consent in chemical trade; Stockholm – persistent organic pollutants; Minamata – mercury.

4. In 2023 the GSI reported India's first lithium resources in Reasi district. Where is it?

A) Rajasthan

B) Karnataka

C) Chhattisgarh

D) Jammu and Kashmir

Answer: D – Explanation: Jammu and Kashmir – Salal–Haimana area, 5.9 million tonnes (inferred). Lithium, atomic number 3, is the lightest metal.

5. Where in Tamil Nadu is CSIR-Central Electrochemical Research Institute (CECRI), a centre for battery research?

A) Tiruchirappalli

B) Madurai

C) Karaikudi

D) Thanjavur

Answer: C – Explanation: Karaikudi (Sivaganga district) – foundation stone laid in 1948 on land and funds given by Alagappa Chettiar (institute opened in 1953); it does lithium-ion battery research.

Sources: The Tribune (ANI); ThePrint; Swarajya; Business Insider; DT Next; Nobel Prize. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.