

## SIMULTANEOUS POLLS PLAN GETS UNION CABINET NOD

## POLITY &amp; GOVERNANCE



The Union Cabinet on Wednesday accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind that had proposed simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step, and municipal and panchayat polls within 100 days of the general election in the next phase.

Asked if the government had a specific timeline such as the 2029 Lok Sabha election for its implementation, Mr. Vaishnav said the implementation would take place after completing the legal processes. The report of the Kovind panel, which ran into more than 18,000 pages, was

submitted to President Droupadi Murmu in March.

To synchronise the elections, the committee has suggested that the President, through a notification issued on the first sitting of the Lok Sabha post general elections, set an 'Appointed Date'. This date would mark the beginning of the new electoral cycle. State Assemblies that are formed after the date and before the completion of the Lok Sabha's term would conclude before the subsequent general elections. After this, election to the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies would be held simultaneously.

The Committee had factored scenarios such as a hung House, or a no-confidence motion, and recommended amendments to Article 83 (duration of Houses of Parliament) and Article 172 (duration of State legislatures) of the Constitution. It recommended a common electoral roll, which would need coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SECs). The ECI is responsible for the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, while the local body elections for municipalities and panchayats are managed by the SECs. The proposed changes regarding the single electoral roll and single voter ID card would need ratification by at least half of the States.

In all, the Kovind panel has recommended 18 constitutional amendments, most of which will not need ratification by State Assemblies. However, any Constitutional amendment Bill needs to be passed by a two-third majority in each house of Parliament.



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# INDUS WATERS: INDIA TO FREEZE NEGOTIATIONS WITH PAKISTAN

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



There will be no more meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission till the governments of India and Pakistan meet and discuss the renegotiation of the 64-year-old Indus Water Treaty. The last meeting was in Delhi in May 2022. Since January 2023, India has written four times to Pakistan to initiate talks on revising the treaty but not received a “satisfactory response”, according to sources.

The PIC is the most consequential product of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), signed in 1960 to manage the sharing of six Himalayan rivers between India and Pakistan. Commissioners of both countries are mandated to meet every year, and sometimes have met multiple times in a year, to discuss and resolve differences on the sharing of river water and construction of hydel projects.

Risking oblivion

Despite wars and disputes between India and Pakistan, and the occasional stalling of the meetings, the PIC has been a permanent fixture. However, with India’s call to renegotiate the IWT in January 2023, the PIC risks oblivion. Pakistan’s first response [following India’s call] was to discuss issues at the level of commissioners. But India denied this on the grounds that the commissioners are meant to execute the treaty and so this can be done only by governments. If the governmental negotiations were to begin to renegotiate the treaty, India could consider reviving the commission as a goodwill measure.

On August 30 this year, India sent a letter to Pakistan, the fourth since 2023, asking to renegotiate the treaty. “India’s notification highlights fundamental and unforeseen changes in circumstances that require a reassessment of obligations under various Articles of the Treaty. Among various concerns, important ones include change in population demographics; environmental issues — need to accelerate development of clean energy to meet India’s emission targets; impact of persistent cross-border terrorism, etc.”

# ‘MILITANTS’ OPEN FIRE IN MANIPUR VILLAGE, VILLAGERS RETALIATE

## INTERNAL SECURITY

Suspected militants launched a fresh attack at Mongbung Meitei village in Manipur’s Jiribam district. The attackers fired several rounds from sophisticated weapons on Tuesday evening prompting retaliation from village volunteers in the area. Security forces were rushed to the spot to bring the situation under control and the firing stopped around 8 p.m.

Authorities are monitoring the situation and have urged villagers to cooperate with security forces while conducting operations. In the last couple of days, villagers have seen multiple drones flying above Mongbung Meitei village.



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## WALKIE-TALKIES, SOLAR EQUIPMENT EXPLODE A DAY AFTER LEBANON PAGER BLASTS, KILL 14

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Explosions were reported in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon in an apparent second wave of detonations of electronic devices, Hezbollah officials and state media said on Wednesday.

At least 14 persons were killed and 450 people wounded on Wednesday when walkie-talkies and even solar equipment blew up, a day after hundreds of pagers exploded, in an attack blamed on Israel.

Several blasts were heard on Wednesday at a funeral in Beirut for three Hezbollah members and a child killed by exploding pagers on Tuesday. A Hezbollah official said walkie-talkies used by the group exploded. Lebanon's official news agency reported that solar energy systems exploded in homes in several areas of Beirut and in southern Lebanon, wounding at least one girl.

New phase: Israel

The new blasts hit a country still thrown into confusion and anger after Tuesday's pager bombings, which appeared to be a complex Israeli attack targeting Hezbollah members, caused civilian casualties too. At least 12 persons were killed, two children among them, and some 2,800 people injured in the pager explosions.

The second wave also deepens concern over the potentially indiscriminate casualties caused in the attacks, in which hundreds of blasts went off wherever the holder of the pager happened to be — often with family or bystanders nearby.

## FIRST PHASE OF POLLS IN J&K PEACEFUL; 61.13 % TURNOUT RECORDED

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE



Voters turned out in good numbers in the 24 Jammu and Kashmir constituencies that went to the polls in the first phase of the Assembly election on Wednesday, registering a polling percentage of 61.13 %. There was a clear increase in turnout in all 16 seats in the militancy-affected areas of the Kashmir Valley, in comparison with the last Assembly election held a decade ago, with many voters and candidates expressing hope that the democratic exercise will bring change to the region. Kishtwar recorded the highest turnout of 80.14 % and Pulwama the lowest at 46.65%, as per provisional data at 11.50 p.m.

**'Call of democracy'**

The eight seats of the Chenab Valley in Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban districts recorded between 68% and 82% polling, while the newly created constituency of Padder-Nagseni in Kishtwar registered a turnout of 80.67%.

The banned Jamaat-e-Islami's decision to field Independent candidates has also contributed to the growth in voting percentage in these areas otherwise known as the 'boycott capitals' of Kashmir. This phase of polling in south Kashmir is likely to determine the fate of the People's Democratic Party, which had won 11 out of the 16 Assembly segments in this region in 2014.

# MADRAS HIGH COURT JUNKS PLEA TO DECLARE TAMIL SAINT-POET'S BIRTHDAY ON VAIKASI ANUSHAM

## ART AND CULTURE



The Madras High Court has refused to declare the day of Anusham star in the Tamil month of Vaikasi as the birthday of Tiruvalluvar, who is believed to have penned Tirukkural, a highly celebrated compendium of 1,330 couplets containing life lessons. Justice M. Dhandapani also refused to issue a direction to the Tamil Nadu government to shift the annual celebration of 'Tiruvalluvar day' from the second day of Tamil month Thai, as it is being followed now, to the Vaikasi Anusha Natchathiram day. The judge dismissed a writ petition filed in 2021 by Samy Thiagarajan, the president of Tiruvalluvar Tirunatkazhagam.

A temple for Tiruvalluvar was in existence at Mylapore in Chennai and that it was around 600 years old. It was under the control of Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments department and it celebrates the birth anniversary of the saint-poet on Vaikasi Anusham day. The petitioner said that even Colombo-based Tamil scholar K.P. Ratnam, who founded Tamil Marai Kazhagam, had spread the message worldwide that the birth anniversary of Tiruvalluvar must be celebrated only on Vaikasi Anusham. A Government Order issued on March 18, 1966, after the conclusion of the first Tiruvalluvar conference, had ordered that 'Tiruvalluvar day' would be celebrated on June 2, 1966, which was a Vaikasi Anusham day. Subsequently, it was shifted to the second day of Thai.

# CHANDRAYAAN-4, VENUS ORBITER GET APPROVAL FROM UNION CABINET

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



In a boost to the space programme, the Union government on Wednesday allocated ₹ 2,104 Cr. for the Chandrayaan-4 mission to bring moon rocks to earth, send a spacecraft to orbit Venus and expand the Gaganyaan project to build an Indian space station.

The Cabinet, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also approved a proposal of the Department of Space to build a next-generation launch vehicle capable of placing heavier payload in orbits, which could also be key to achieving the targets of setting up a space station and landing an Indian astronaut on the moon. The Union Cabinet has approved the first step towards the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), expanding the Gaganyaan programme. This landmark decision brings us

closer to a self-sustained space station by 2035 and a crewed lunar mission by 2040.

A natural successor to Chandrayaan-3 is the demonstration of the ability to collect lunar samples and return them safely back to earth. Chandrayaan-4 will involve multiple launches, and the premier space agency is set to perform a space docking experiment later this year to develop its capabilities for the challenging endeavour.

The Cabinet approved ₹ 1,236 Cr. for the Venus Orbiter Mission, which is expected to be launched in March 2028. This will be India's second interplanetary mission after the Mars Orbiter Mission, launched on November 5, 2013. The Cabinet also gave its nod to an additional funding of ₹ 11,170 Cr. to the Gaganyaan programme, which already has a sanctioned budget of ₹ 9,023 Cr.



## PM-AASHA SCHEMES TO CONTINUE WITH ADDITIONS: CENTRE

### DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the continuation of schemes of the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA). The schemes under PM-AASHA will ensure remunerative prices to farmers and control price volatility of essential commodities to benefit consumers. The Cabinet also fixed the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) rates for the upcoming rabi season on phosphatic and potassic (P and K) fertilisers. The tentative budgetary requirement for this will be ₹24,475.53 Cr.

The total financial outgo for PM-AASHA will be ₹35,000 Cr. during the 15th Finance Commission cycle up to 2025-26. The Centre has converged the Price Support Scheme (PSS) and Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) schemes in PM-AASHA. PM-AASHA will now have the components of PSS, PSF and the Price Deficit Payment Scheme (PDPS) and Market Intervention Scheme (MIS).

The extension of the PSF scheme will help in protecting consumers from extreme volatility in prices of agri-horticultural commodities by maintaining strategic buffer stock of pulses and onion for calibrated release. It will also discourage hoarding and unscrupulous speculation, and ensure supplies to consumers at affordable prices.

#### Subsidy for fertilizers

On the fertilizer subsidy, the Centre said it will ensure availability of fertilizers to farmers at subsidised, affordable and reasonable prices. It added that the rationalisation of subsidy on P and K fertilisers is taken in view of the recent trends in the international prices of fertilizers and inputs.

## CENTRE MAY ARGUE ON LAW IF IT DOESN'T RESPOND TO PLEAS ON MARITAL RAPE: SC

### POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Wednesday said have the top Court would present oral arguments on the tenets of the law when the case comes up for hearing if the Union government did not want to file a response to petitions before the Supreme Court seeking the criminalisation of marital rape. The observation followed an oral mentioning made by senior advocate Indira Jaising requesting a Bench headed by Chief Justice Chandrachud to fix a specific date for hearing the case.

On an earlier occasion, the Centre, represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, noted the case posed legal ramifications as well as societal viewpoints. The petitions were triggered by mutually exclusive decisions by the Karnataka and Delhi High Courts, calling for an authoritative pronouncement from the top court.

The Karnataka High Court had held that a husband was liable to be charged for rape if he had forcible sex with his wife. The Karnataka government had supported the High Court judgment in an affidavit in the top court subsequently. Exception 2 to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) decriminalised marital rape. It had provided that non-consensual sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, if she was over 15 years, did not amount to rape. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the IPC, retained the same exception (Section 63), but raised the age of the woman from 15 to 18.

#### 'Rape is rape'

The Karnataka High Court had observed "a man is a man; an act is an act; rape is a rape, be it performed by a man the 'husband' on the woman 'wife'". But a Division Bench of the Delhi High Court delivered a split verdict in a separate case on the identical issue in May 2022. Justice Rajiv Shakhder, the lead judge on the Bench, struck down the exception to Section 375 as unconstitutional. However, Justice C. Hari Shankar, the associate judge on the High Court Bench, took the reverse view. He adopted the traditional stance that changes in the law was the sole terrain of the legislature. The Justice JS Verma Committee of 2013 had recommended the removal of the exception.

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# ₹5 LAKH TO TRANSFORM TRIBAL HOUSE INTO HOMESTAY UNIT

## DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a package that will provide up to ₹5 lakh each to tribal households and villages across the country, to turn their homes into tourist homestays or to build new ones under the Tourism Ministry's Swadesh Darshan scheme. This is meant to "tap the tourist potential of tribal areas" and to "provide alternative livelihood".

This is one of the 25 interventions planned under the Pradhan Mantri-Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan (PMJUGA), an umbrella package to implement existing schemes in 63,000 Scheduled Tribe-majority villages. For instance, the Swadesh Darshan scheme was launched a decade ago, in 2014-15, though the tribal homestay proposal may be a new element.

### Action plan

The PMJUGA package is aimed at ensuring the saturation of basic schemes in tribal villages, with interventions to be implemented by 17 Ministries, and funding coming from each Ministry's allocated share in the Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes. Together, this will involve an outlay of ₹ 79,156 Cr., to be spent over five years, with a Central share of ₹ 56,333 Cr., and a States' share of ₹ 22,823 Cr. Significantly, Maharashtra and Jharkhand, which are both headed to the polls later this year, account for over 18 % of the country's tribal population.

The PMJUGA intends to bring sustainable agricultural practices to all Forest Rights Act (FRA) patta holders "to enable them for maintenance and conservation of forest". As of June 2024, more than 24 lakh FRA titles have been granted to people and communities from Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other traditional forest-dwelling groups, covering over 1.9 Cr. acres of forest land across the country. However, of the 50.5 lakh claims filed under the FRA, 34.83 % have been rejected and 15.9 % remain pending. The government hopes to "catalyse" pending claims and expedite the recognition and securing of forest rights.

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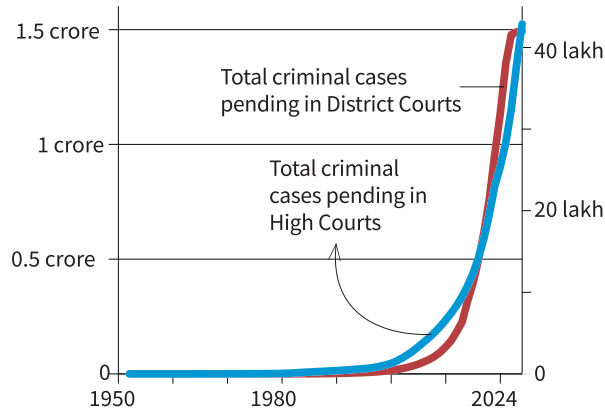


# FAST-TRACK COURTS: JUSTICE ON THE CLOCK

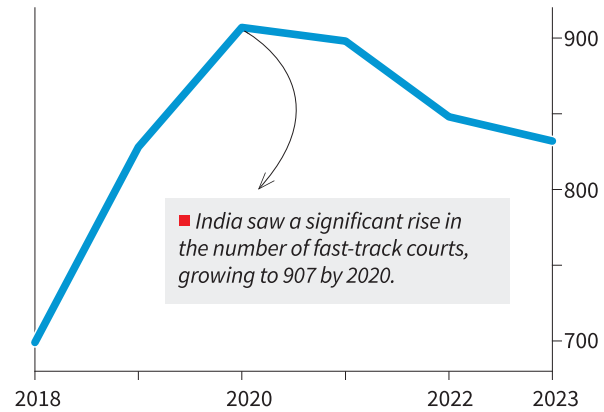
## POLITY & GOVERNANCE



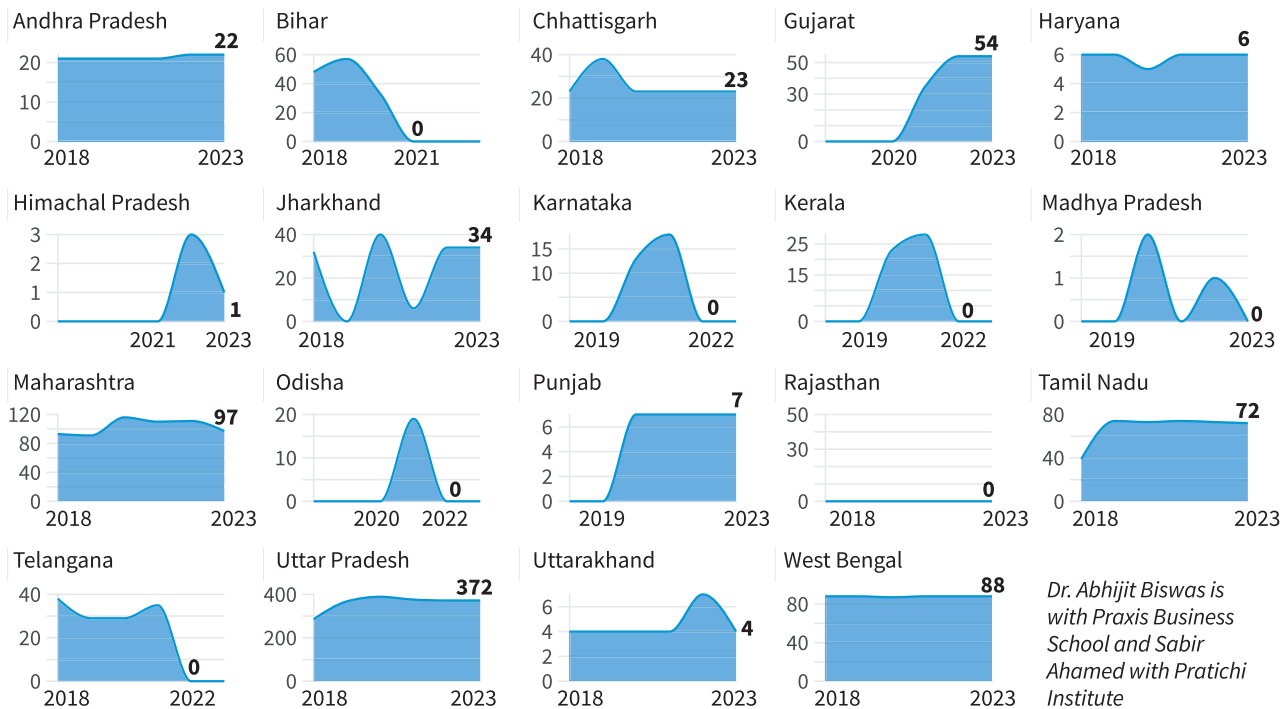
**Chart 1:** The chart shows the total criminal cases pending in High Courts (right axis) and District Courts (left axis)



**Chart 2:** The chart shows the number of fast-track courts established between 2018 to 2023



**Chart 3:** The chart shows the number of functional fast-track courts over time across select major States



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**Chart 2** indicates that between 2018 and 2020, India saw a significant rise in the number of fast-track courts. In 2018, 699 courts were operational, growing to 907 by 2020.

**Chart 3** shows the number of functional fast-track courts over time across select major States. States with fewer financial capabilities struggle to keep fast-track courts functioning optimally.

## CAN SHEIKH HASINA BE EXTRADITED?

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Minister is crucial.

In 2013, India and Bangladesh signed an extradition treaty as a strategic measure to address insurgency and terrorism along their shared borders. It was amended in 2016 to ease the process of exchange of fugitives wanted by both nations. The treaty has facilitated the transfer of several notable political prisoners. For instance, in 2020, two convicts involved in the 1975 assassination of Ms. Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, were extradited to Bangladesh for execution. Similarly, India successfully secured the extradition of Anup Chetia, the General Secretary of the banned United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), who had spent 18 years imprisoned in Dhaka. The treaty mandates the extradition of individuals charged with or convicted of crimes that warrant a minimum sentence of one year's imprisonment. A key requirement for extradition is the principle of dual criminality, meaning that the offence must be punishable in both countries. Since the charges against Ms. Hasina are prosecutable in India, and the penalties for her alleged crimes are also substantial, she qualifies for extradition on these grounds. Additionally, the treaty encompasses within its ambit attempts to commit, as well as aid, abet, incite, or act as an accomplice in such crimes.

Notably, the 2016 amendment to the treaty substantially lowered the threshold for extradition by removing the requirement to furnish concrete evidence against the offender. Under Article 10 of the treaty, only an arrest warrant issued by a competent court in the requesting country is sufficient to initiate the extradition process.

#### Can extradition be refused?

Article 6 of the treaty stipulates that extradition may be refused if the offence is of a "political nature". However, there are stringent limitations on this particular exemption. A host of offences such as murder, terrorism-related crimes, and kidnapping, are explicitly excluded from being classified as political. Given that several of the charges against Ms. Hasina — such as murder and enforced disappearance — fall outside the scope of this exemption, it is unlikely that India will be able to justify them as political transgressions to deny extradition.

Another basis for refusal is outlined in Article 8, which permits denial of a request if the accusation is not "made in good faith in the interests of justice" or if it involves military offences not considered "an offence under general criminal law." India could potentially refuse extradition on the ground that the charges against Ms. Hasina have not been levelled in good faith and there is a possibility of her being subjected to political persecution or an unfair trial upon her return to Bangladesh.

The chief prosecutor of Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has announced plans to seek the extradition of ousted leader Sheikh Hasina from neighbouring India. Ms. Hasina had sought refuge in India in August after a mass uprising compelled her to step down. Since her departure, numerous criminal cases have been lodged against her and her aides, encompassing charges of murder, torture, abduction, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Additionally, India and Bangladesh have a bilateral extradition treaty in place that could allow for her return to face trial.

#### What does the extradition treaty say?

The ICT was established in 2010 by Ms. Hasina to investigate crimes committed during the 1971 independence war from Pakistan. Under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973, Bangladeshi courts can proceed with criminal trials even in Ms. Hasina's absence. However, this is bound to raise concerns about the fairness of the proceedings, and adherence to due process, while also complicating the enforcement of judicial orders. Therefore, the extradition of the former Prime



Such concerns are further exacerbated by recent reports that ministers from Ms. Hasina's cabinet were physically arrested by bystanders while being transported to court for remand hearings.

### What are the potential implications?

Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia, with bilateral trade estimated at \$ 15.9 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23. Before Ms. Hasina's ouster, both nations were poised to commence dialogue on a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) to foster economic ties. Following the regime change in Dhaka, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken with the Chief Adviser of the new interim government, Muhammad Yunus, and pledged continued support for ongoing development projects.

## 'DIAMOND SECTOR FACING SEVERE CRISIS WITH FACTORY CLOSURES, JOB LOSSES'

### ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

India's diamond sector is facing a severe crisis as both imports and exports have sharply declined in the past three years, triggering defaults, factory closures, and widespread job losses. It said while export returns had surged, a large inventory of unprocessed rough diamonds was piling up due to reduced orders and growing competition from lab-grown diamonds.

This has triggered defaults, factory closures, and widespread job losses. Tragically, more than 60 people in Gujarat's diamond sector have committed suicide, reflecting the severe financial and emotional strain India's diamond sector is facing," Global Trade Research Initiative's (GTRI) Founder Ajay Srivastava said. He said immediate action was essential to address these problems and to safeguard the future of the sector.

According to GTRI data, a 24.5 % drop in rough diamond imports from \$18.5 billion in 2021-22 to \$ 14 billion in 2023-24 shows weaker global markets and fewer processing orders. It added that some challenges of the sector stemmed from regulatory issues and internal inefficiencies within the industry.

## CENTRE MULLS FINANCING OPTIONS FOR GREENING STEEL SECTOR

### ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Steel Ministry could consider taking up financing options to carry out or support decarbonisation projects in the sector. The schemes are likely to be funded through PLI (Performance-Linked Incentives) and discussions on this are underway. While discussions on such schemes or projects have begun, and some of the companies such as Tata Steel, JSPL and others are working towards metal offerings with lower carbon emissions, the Minister said, "there is still a long way to go".

### Natural substitutes

Use or supply of natural gas to steel companies to act as substitutes for coal or coke in blast furnaces may be looked at. A 'green steel' policy is already in the works. There are several PLI schemes that can be introduced for decarbonisation activities in the sector. Discussions are going on and they are in initial stages. But there is a long way to go.

For decarbonisation to happen, investments expected are to the tune of nearly \$300 billion. Decarbonisation would require focus on increasing the integration of renewable energy sources in the steel sector to as high as 43 %, from the existing 7%-or-so. Mandating the use of greener raw materials for luxury car manufacturers, tax waivers, and so on, have been suggested to bring about the transition.

### Energy management

Implementation of the best available technologies at small steel mills alone is estimated at over \$13 billion. The cost of the technological transition (direct reduction of iron, carbon capture and utilisation technologies) is another \$150 billion, the report mentioned. Energy consumption in most of the integrated steel plants in India is generally high at 6-6.5 Giga Calorie per tonne of crude steel compared to 4.5-5 in steel plants abroad. The higher rate of energy consumption is mainly due to use of coal and other older technologies.

The average CO2 emission intensity of the steel industry was projected to reduce from 3.1 T/tcs (tonne/ tonne of crude steel produced) in 2005 to 2.64 T/tcs by 2020. The current goal is to bring it down to 2.4 T/tcs by 2030.

### Import duty

According to Mr. Kumaraswamy, discussions on “protecting” the steel industry from imports are also on the Ministry’s radar. Options being discussed include price adjustment mechanisms for shipments coming in, raising import duties or tariffs from the existing 7.5% to 10-12%, safeguarding duties or border-adjustment tax mechanisms, among others. India remained a net importer of steel by 1.6 MT, as shipments coming into the country continued to witness an increasing trend on a year-on-year basis.

## ISRAEL SHOULD PULL BACK FROM PALESTINE IN 12 MONTHS: UN

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The United Nations General Assembly on Wednesday adopted a Palestinian-drafted resolution that demands Israel end “its unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory” within 12 months. The resolution received 124 votes in favour, while 43 countries abstained and Israel, the U.S. and 12 others voted no. The action isolates Israel days before world leaders travel to New York for their annual UN gathering. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due to address the 193-member General Assembly on September 26.



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