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Timor-Leste to drill for rare earths in battery supply chain drive – regulator



By Anthony Barich



Mineral exploration mapping and sampling in Timor-Leste, which is running investor roadshows for its second exploration licensing round.

Source: Estrella Resources Ltd.

State-owned miner Murak Rai Timor E.P. will soon start Timor-Leste's first drilling project for rare earths as the fledgling country seeks to participate in global battery supply chains, according to Rafael de Araújo, president of mining regulator Autoridade Nacional dos Minerais (ANM).

Timor-Leste issued its first round of mineral exploration tenements in 2023 after approving a new mining code in 2021. The move was expected to help the Southeast Asian country diversify from oil and gas, on which its economy has heavily depended since gaining independence from Indonesia in 2002, de Araújo said during a March 4 investor briefing in Perth, Australia.

Timor-Leste officials, including de Araújo, were in Perth as part of a roadshow that has also included Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Jakarta, among other cities in the region, to promote its second licensing round launched in November 2025.



**Rafael de Araújo, president
of Timor-Leste's Autoridade
Nacional dos Minerais.**

Source: ANM.

Murak Rai Timor started work in August 2024 on three blocks with a total area of 150 square kilometers in the western part of the island. The blocks, which were granted in 2023, were the first attempts to explore for rare earth elements in Timor-Leste, de Araújo said.

The company will start drilling targets on its concessions by the end of this year, or the first half of 2027 at the latest, de Araújo told Platts, part of S&P Global Energy, on the forum sidelines.

Geological studies have suggested that "Timor-Leste has good potential for rare earth elements with a very high grade," de Araújo said during the briefing.

The country hopes to aid the drive to diversify supply chains for the commodities needed for renewable energy, batteries and other modern manufacturing, the ANM president said. Rare earth supply chains are currently dominated by China.

"Demand for ... critical minerals is very high at the moment, so as a country, after conducting our geological studies [and] developing our understanding of what we have in terms of the natural resources, we think that we also would like to contribute in supporting the global demand for the critical minerals," de Araújo said.

Bids for the second licensing round will close in April to June, with the winners to be announced in July and the licenses to be granted in August, de Araújo said.

Critical minerals attraction

Timor-Leste's geology is the result of an ancient collision between the tectonic plates of Australia and Indonesia, both of which are major mineral producers, Andre Nono, ANM's manager for quarries, mines development and production, said during the Perth briefing.

"We believe that Timor-Leste also has potential to host metallic minerals just like Australia and Indonesia," Nono said.

This also gives Timor-Leste authorities confidence in the country's rare earths potential, de Araújo said, as Western Australia hosts Lynas Rare Earths Ltd.'s Mt Weld mine. The project, currently being expanded, is one of the few operating rare earths mines outside China.

The second licensing round covers several zones that government surveys have revealed as potentially rich in copper and rare earths, including yttrium, lanthanides and cerium, along with manganese, gold, limestone, bentonite, silver, gabbro, iron, dolomite, gypsum, marble and clay minerals, Nono said.

ANM's Perth forum also attracted representatives from major iron ore miners Fortescue Ltd. and Rio Tinto Group, both of which are looking to grow their exposure to critical minerals. A representative from Rio Tinto Exploration Pty Ltd. sat down for a meeting with de Araújo after the ANM officials' briefings.

The forum was also attended by a representative from lithium and iron ore producer Mineral Resources Ltd. and drilling contractor Imdex Ltd., among other Australian companies and industry consultants.

Australia-listed and headquartered Estrella Resources Ltd. is the most advanced explorer in Timor-Leste, with mapping and drilling of about 80 holes, de Araújo told Platts.

The ANM president said Estrella has also attracted the interest of Asian steelmakers since starting the extraction of samples at the Ira Miri project in Timor-Leste in January to produce up to 30,000 metric tons of manganese ore for market appraisal.