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Trump Jr, European Lithium's Tanbreez and the new geopolitics of rare earths

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Tony Sage's recent meeting with Donald Trump Jr. in Singapore highlights how a once-obscure rare earths project in southern Greenland could become increasingly important in the global race to secure critical minerals supply chains.

Sage, the CEO of European Lithium Ltd (ASX:EUR, OTCQB:EULIF), the owner of Critical Metals Corp, sat down with Trump Jr. to discuss the potential for the Tanbreez Rare Earths Project to help break China's dominance over heavy rare earth elements. While the conversation was informal, it reflects the growing convergence between private capital, geopolitical strategy and the mining sector as Western governments scramble to secure supply of minerals essential to modern technology and defence systems.

Donald Trump Jr. and European Lithium CEO Tony Sage, after discussing the potential of the Tanbreez mine to end China's dominance of the heavy rare earths market.

Trump Jr. is heavily involved in the rare earths sector. His venture capital firm, 1789 Capital, backs rare earths magnet producer Vulcan Elements, a North Carolina-based company that recently secured a $620 million direct loan from the US Department of Defense as part of a broader $1.4 billion agreement aimed at boosting domestic rare earth magnet production.

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Rare earth magnets are critical components in everything from electric vehicles and robotics to semiconductors, wind turbines, drones and smartphones. The Pentagon's willingness to fund projects across the rare earth value chain reflects a growing consensus in Washington that supply security for these materials is increasingly viewed as a matter of national security.

That same strategic imperative sits at the centre of Critical Metals' Tanbreez project in Greenland.

Tanbreez hosts one of the world's largest rare earth deposits, containing the mineral eudialyte, which is enriched in rare earth elements. Importantly, around 30% of the deposit consists of heavy rare earth elements — the most strategically valuable portion of the rare earths spectrum because they are essential for defence technologies, high-performance magnets and advanced electronics.

Tanbreez Rare Earths Project (Source: Critical Metals Corp)

Heavy rare earths are far more difficult to source than their light rare earth counterparts and remain heavily concentrated in Chinese supply chains. China controls roughly 90% of global rare earth processing capacity, giving it enormous leverage over global technology supply chains.

Tanbreez emerges as a strategic Western asset

The geopolitical stakes have been rising in recent years. Beijing has imposed export controls on several strategic minerals, including gallium, germanium and antimony — materials used in semiconductors and defence applications. The move highlights the vulnerability of Western supply chains and accelerated efforts in the United States and Europe to develop alternative sources of critical minerals.

Tanbreez has become part of that strategic equation.

According to reporting from Reuters, US and Danish officials last year urged the project's former owner not to sell the asset to Chinese-linked companies, highlighting the level of Western interest in keeping the deposit within aligned supply chains. Ultimately, the project was acquired by New York-listed Critical Metals Corp in a deal valued at roughly $216 million, including $5 million in cash and $211 million in shares.

Sage later confirmed that his company had faced considerable pressure not to sell the project to Chinese buyers, despite reportedly higher offers from Chinese groups.

"There was a lot of pressure not to sell to China," Sage said at the time.

The acquisition reflects a broader shift in the rare earths investment landscape, where projects once considered technically challenging or economically marginal are now attracting attention due to their strategic value.

Tanbreez's mineralogy has historically been viewed as complex, and analysts have previously questioned whether the project could reach commercial production. But geopolitical considerations are increasingly changing how such projects are evaluated.

Pentagon interest and the defence supply chain

For Critical Metals, the project sits at the centre of plans to establish a Western rare earth supply chain.

Sage has confirmed the company is in discussions with US authorities regarding potential sales of rare earth material to the United States and the construction of a processing facility in the country. Critical Metals previously applied for US Department of Defense funding for a processing plant, with discussions expected to continue following the transition to the new US administration.

The company is also exploring potential supply agreements with major defence contractors including Lockheed Martin Corp (NYSE:LMT), RTX Corp (NYSE:RTX, XETRA:5UR) and Boeing Co (NYSE:BA, XETRA:BCO).

These conversations highlight how deeply the defence sector has become involved in critical minerals development. Advanced weapons systems such as the F-35 fighter jet, unmanned aerial vehicles and modern submarine fleets all rely on heavy rare earth elements to produce high-performance permanent magnets and other specialised components.

Ensuring reliable access to these materials has become a strategic priority for Western governments.

Greenland and the future of the 'Mighty 17'

Greenland itself has also emerged as a focal point in this competition. The Arctic island hosts significant untapped mineral resources, including rare earths, graphite and other strategic materials, but remains largely underdeveloped.

The renewed attention partly explains the heightened political interest in the territory in recent years, including former US president Donald Trump's widely reported interest in acquiring Greenland and Donald Trump Jr.'s recent visit to Nuuk.

For industry figures like Sage, the intersection of geopolitics and mining is no longer theoretical. The race to secure supply of critical minerals — particularly rare earths — is reshaping investment decisions, government policy and international partnerships.

As countries seek to reduce their reliance on Chinese supply chains, projects such as Tanbreez are increasingly viewed not just as mining assets but as strategic infrastructure.

Sage himself has framed rare earth elements — sometimes called the "Mighty 17" — as the foundation of the next phase of technological development. From electric vehicles and renewable energy systems to defence platforms and artificial intelligence infrastructure, rare earths play a central role in enabling modern industry.

That is why a conversation in Singapore between a mining executive and the son of a former US president may carry far greater significance than it initially appears.

It reflects a growing reality: in the emerging global competition for critical minerals, mining projects are no longer just commercial ventures. They are becoming strategic assets in a geopolitical contest over the materials that will power the technologies — and security systems — of the future.

Insight

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