

RARE EARTHS



# Indian Minerals Yearbook 2017

(Part- III : Mineral Reviews)

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**RARE EARTHS**

**(ADVANCE RELEASE)**

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
MINISTRY OF MINES  
INDIAN BUREAU OF MINES**

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## 24 Rare Earths

The term "rare earth" arises from the minerals from which they were first isolated, which were uncommon oxide-type minerals (earth) found in Gadolinite extracted from one mine in the village of Ytterby, Sweden. However, with the exception of the highly-unstable promethium, rare earth elements are found in relatively high concentrations in the earth's crust with cerium being the 25<sup>th</sup> most abundant element in the earth's crust at 68 parts per million.

The rare earth elements (REE) are a collection of 17 elements namely scandium, yttrium and lanthanides (15 elements in the periodic table with atomic numbers 57 to 71 namely; lanthanum (La), cerium (Ce), praseodymium (Pr), neodymium (Nd), promethium (Pm), samarium (Sm), europium (Eu), gadolinium (Gd), terbium (Tb), dysprosium (Dy), holmium (Ho), erbium (Er), thulium (Tm), ytterbium (Yb) and lutetium (Lu).

Although these elements tend to occur together, the lanthanide elements are divided into two groups. The light elements are those with atomic numbers 57 through 63 (La, Ce, Pr, Nd, Pm, Sm and Eu) and the heavy elements are those with atomic numbers 64 to 71 (Gd, Tb, Dy, Ho, Er, Tm, Yb and Lu).

Rare earth elements (REE) are characterised by high density, high melting point, high conductivity and high thermal conductance. A number of rare earth minerals contain thorium and uranium in variable amounts, but they do not constitute essential components in the composition of the minerals.

The principal sources of rare earth elements are bastnaesite (a fluorocarbonate which occurs in carbonatites and related igneous rocks), xenotime (yttrium phosphate) commonly found in mineral sand deposits, loparite which occurs in alkaline igneous rocks and monazite (a phosphate). The rare earths occur in many other minerals and are recoverable as by-products from phosphate rock and from spent uranium leaching. In India, monazite is the principal source of rare earths and thorium.

### RESOURCES

The mineral monazite is a prescribed substance as per the notification under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. AMD has been carrying out its resource evaluation for over six decades. It occurs in association with other heavy minerals such as ilmenite, rutile, zircon, etc. in concentrations of 0.4 – 4.3% of total heavies in the beach and inland placer deposits of the country.

The resource estimates of monazite in the beach and inland placer deposits have been enhanced from 10.70 million tonnes in 2009 to 11.935 million tonnes in 2016. The statewise resources are given in Table- 1.

### EXPLORATION & DEVELOPMENT

The exploration and development details are given in the review on EXPLORATION & DEVELOPMENT in "GENERAL REVIEWS".

**Table – 1: Resources of Monazite**

State	Resources* (In million tonnes)
<b>All India</b>	<b>11.935</b>
Andhra Pradesh	3.72
Gujarat	0.003
Jharkhand	0.22
Kerala	1.90
Maharashtra	0.002
Odisha	2.41
Tamil Nadu	2.46
West Bengal	1.22

*Source: Department of Atomic Energy, Mumbai.*

*\*Inclusive of indicated, inferred and speculative categories.*

## PRODUCTION AND PRICES

IREL, a Government of India Undertaking, and KMML, a Kerala State Government Undertaking, are actively engaged in mining and processing of beach sand minerals from placer deposits. IREL produced 956 tonnes rare earths. The prices of rare earths in India during 2013-14 to 2015-16 are given in Tables- 2.

## MINING AND PROCESSING

Mining of beach sand is being carried out by IREL and KMML. The installed capacity of monazite (96% pure) separation plant of IREL at Manavalakurichi is 6,000 tpy while that of KMML at Chavara is 240 tpy. Details regarding mining and processing, etc. are provided in the Review on 'Ilmenite and Rutile'.

## INDUSTRY

IREL has a plant at Udyogamandal, Aluva, located in Ernakulam district, Kerala, wherein the monazite obtained from Manavalakurichi is chemically treated to separate rare earths in its composite chloride form and thorium as hydroxide upgrade. Ground monazite is digested with caustic soda lye to produce trisodium phosphate (TSP) and mixed hydroxide slurry. This slurry is used for production of diverse rare earth compounds. Elaborate solvent extraction and ion exchange facilities were built to produce individual RE oxides, like oxides of Y, Ce, Nd, Pr and La of specific purities. India is the second largest supplier of yttrium in the world and the maximum production is reported from this plant in Kerala. Uranium values present in monazite which are recovered in the form of nuclear grade ammonium diuranate (ADU) are vital supplement to the indigenous supply of uranium. Thorium is separated in its pure oxalate form. A part of it is taken to OSCOM for further processing by solvent extraction to produce thorium nitrate. A small part of the purified thorium nitrate is converted to nuclear grade thorium oxide powder for supply to Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and Nuclear Fuel Complex (NFC) for developing thorium based fuel for nuclear reactors. IREL has built a large stockpile of impure thorium hydroxide upgrade associated with rare earths and unreacted materials.

IREL has also entered into memorandum of understanding (MoU) with BARC, DMRL and International Advanced Research Center for

powder metallurgy & New material (ARCI) for development of rare earth permanent magnet rings. DMRL has the necessary technology for production of rare earth magnets. BARC has developed the technology for manufacturing of RE Phosphors. However, these technologies are yet to see commercial application. Japan and India have reached at a basic agreement to jointly develop rare earths, used in the production of several high-tech goods from weapons to cellphones & supply to Japan about 14% of its rare earths needs. IREL has also set up a Monazite Processing Plant (MoPP) at Odisha to produce about 11,000 tonnes of Rare Earth Chloride and associated products and High Pure rare Earths (HPRE) plant at Rare Earth Division, Aluva to produce separated Rare Earth Oxide/carbonates. The company is also in the process of facilitation, setting up of industry in value chain of minerals produced other than expanding its existing capacity in near future. IREL has in house R&D division at Kollam, Kerala to support mineral and chemical operation and Corporate Office at Mumbai, Maharashtra.

The production of rare earth compounds from monazite at Udyogamandal plant is furnished in Table - 3.

**Table – 2: Domestic Prices of Rare Earths  
2013-14 to 2015-16**

(In ₹ per kg)

Year	Grade	Price	Remarks
<b>2013-14</b>	RE chloride	180	Ex-works, packed
	RE fluoride (Lumps)	450	Ex-works, packed
	Dicarbonate -Wet	150	Ex-works, packed
	Difluoride	285	Ex-works, packed
	Cerium hydrate - Dry	500	Ex-works, packed
	Cerium oxide B	550	Ex-works, packed
	Neo oxide - 95%	3420	Ex-works, packed
	Neo Oxide - 99%	3800	Ex-works, packed
<b>2014-15</b>	RE chloride	180	Ex-works, packed
	RE fluoride (lumps)	450	Ex-works, packed
	Dicarbonate - Wet	150	Ex-works, packed
	Difluoride	285	Ex-works, packed
	Cerium hydrate -Dry	500	Ex-works, packed
	Cerium oxide B	550	Ex-works, packed
	Neo oxide - 95%	3420	Ex-works, packed
	Neo oxide - 99%	3800	Ex-works, packed
<b>2015-16</b>	Not Available		

*Source: Department of Atomic Energy, Mumbai.*

## RARE EARTHS

**Table – 3: Production of Rare Earth Compounds (IREL)**

(In tonnes)

Product	Specification	Installed capacity (tpy)	Production		
			2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
RE chloride	REO 45% min. CeO <sub>2</sub> /REO 45% min.	-	-	-	-
RE fluoride	TO>78%, F>26% CeO <sub>2</sub> /TO>45%	114	-	-	-
RE oxide	-	-	-	-	-
Cerium hydrate	Total REO>80% (dry) (30% for wet) CeO <sub>2</sub> >68%, CeO <sub>2</sub> /Total REO >85%	-	-	-	-
Cerium oxide	Grade C: CeO <sub>2</sub> 99.00% min. Grade D: CeO <sub>2</sub> 99.95% min. CeO <sub>2</sub> 99.99% min.	-	-	-	-
ADU	Nuclear Grade	28	26.5	26.20	32.0
Yttrium oxide	-	-	-	-	-

*Source: Indian Rare Earths Ltd*

*Note: The plant has stopped production since 2004. Hence, installed capacity is redundant for products other than RE fluoride and ADU.*

*ADU: Ammonium diuranate. RE: Rare Earths.*

## POLICY

The recent amendment to Atomic Mineral Concession Rules (AMCR) 2016 stipulates reserving all Beach Sand Mines (BSM) deposits containing more than 0.75 per cent monazite in the Total Heavy Minerals (THM) for Government-owned corporations. As per the Foreign Trade Policy, 2015-2020 and the effective policy on export and import, the import of ores and concentrates of rare earth metals (under HS code 25309040) and of rare earth oxides including rutile sand (HS code 26140031) are permitted 'freely'. Rare earth compounds are freely exportable, but rare earths phosphates (Monazite), which contain uranium and thorium are prescribed substances and controlled under Atomic Energy Act, 1962.

## USES & CONSUMPTION

Rare earth materials are utilised in a wide range of critical products enabling many emerging green energy technologies, high tech applications and defence systems such as hybrid cars, plug-in-hybrid electric-vehicles (PHEVs), the latest generation of efficient windpower turbines, computer disc drives, missile guidance systems, etc. The lanthanide elements as a group have magnetic, chemical and spectroscopic properties that have led to their application in wide range of end-uses. Cerium finds application in polishing of glass items like lenses and display screens of cathode-ray tubes, liquid-crystal displays and plasma-display panels, in petrol and diesel fuels as fuel additive

and along with lanthanum for replacement of cadmium in red pigments. Mixed salts of the cerium group of elements, other than fluorides are used in medicine, non-irritating antiseptic dressings, waterproofing agents and fungicides in textile manufacture. The principal uses of commercially pure cerium compounds that are in the form of nitrate is in the manufacture of incandescent gas mantles and cerium compounds as oxide. It also finds usage as a polishing agent of glass. Cerium compounds are also used in ceramic and glass as colouring pigments and also as catalysts in chemical industry.

Indian Rare Earths Ltd signed a sale purchase agreement (SPA) with Toyota Corporation, Japan and their subsidiary Toyotsu Rare Earth India Pvt Ltd, Vizag (TREI) on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2015 for supply of Rare Earth Chloride (RECL) being produced at Monazite Processing Plant (MoPP) at IREL's OSCOM Unit in Odisha to TREI for value addition purpose. During the year 2016, IREL has supplied over 1,200 tonnes of RECL on dry metric basis to TREI. IREL expects to supply substantially higher tonnage to TREI during the 2<sup>nd</sup> contract year.

To produce samarium-cobalt (Sm-Co) magnet for meeting national objectives, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) has been formed. Production of Sm-Co metal and Magnet is based on technologies developed by BARC, Mumbai & DMRL, Hyderabad. Activities for firming up the investment, plant location etc. is under progress.

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An MoU has been signed with BARC, Mumbai for setting up of 5 Million Litres per day (MLD) desalination plant at OSCOM, Odisha as part of field application of indigenous desalination technology in DAE units.

Supply of Nuclear Grade Ammonium di uranate (NGADU) from new source i.e. the newly commissioned monazite processing plant at OSCOM, Odisha commenced.

Approval has been received for entering into production sharing contract viz. concessions and profits sharing option with land owner having surface rights within IREL mining lease area with a view to mitigate the difficulties in sourcing land for new material of the southern operating units of IREL.

Subsequent to identification and development of conditions for dissolution of Rare Earths (REE) from fly ash generated at lignite coal fired thermal power plant at Neyveli, Tamil Nadu, studies were taken up to understand the department of REE in various phases constituting the fly ash to improve overall process efficiency and precipitate dissolved rare earths in purified form.

Cerium, lanthanum and neodymium are used as glass additives in optical lenses and display screens, as catalysts in automobiles to reduce sulphur di-oxide emission, in multilayer capacitors and along with yttrium in magnesium, aluminium and hydrogen storage alloys. Mischmetal which is an alloy of cerium with small amounts of other rare earth metals is used in lighter flints, for desulphurisation in steel and foundry, and with lanthanum alloys, in batteries and hydrogen storage systems meant for electronics and hybrid cars. Cerium oxide are used in glass polishing industries.

Lanthanum oxide and neodymium compounds are used in special glass manufacture. Lanthanum finds application in X-ray films as phosphorous; yttrium in advanced ceramics like nitrides, Y-stabilised ceramics, etc., and gadolinium in magnet alloys. Yttrium, europium and terbium are used as phosphorous in displays of computers, TV, etc. and with lanthanum, cerium & gadolinium as phosphorous in fluorescent and halogen lamps. Neodymium, samarium, dysprosium, praseodymium and terbium have application as high intensity magnets in electronics, electric motors and audio equipment. Lanthanum, erbium and ytterbium have application in fibre optics and lasers. Lanthanum and yttrium finds application in solid oxide fuel cells. Scandium is used mainly in aluminium alloys for sporting goods. Scandium in minor amounts is used in semiconductors and special lighting, including halogen bulbs. Mixed rare earth products are used as catalysts in

petroleum refining and fluid cracking. Neodymium is used in welding in heavy industries and also in MRI scanners. Praseodymium is not a primary element for any specific use, but finds use as a substitute for neodymium in magnets.

Samarium is used essentially for the Sm-Co magnets. Europium is a primary component of phosphorus and is responsible for white light in compact fluorescent lamps when used with terbium compounds.

Erbium used as fibre optic and has emerged in the nineties as a remarkable tool for communication technology through which high quality rapid data in tight pulses can be transferred in speed unthinkable in the past.

The main application for neodymium-iron-boron (Nd-Fe-B) magnets are in automobiles for anti-lock brakes, and in computer hard disk drives, videos, CD-ROMs used in many small-size electronic consumer products, such as, digital cameras, where major advantage is their small sizes. Nickel metal hydride (Ni MH) batteries, containing mischmetal, a mixture of rare earth compounds, are used mainly in portable electronic equipment, such as, laptops, camcorders and mobile phones. Though, the market for batteries for portable electronic equipment is growing strongly, the Ni MH batteries are increasingly replaced by lithium-ion batteries.

Monazite contains about 25.28%  $P_2O_5$  which can be recovered as a by-product for manufacture of fertilizers and production of elemental phosphorus or its salts. Besides, rare earths, thorium is recovered from monazite. It is a source of atomic energy. An important use of thorium is for addition to tungsten in minute quantity (about 0.75%) to increase the ductility of tungsten wire and thus to facilitate its drawing into filaments used in electric lamps. Metallic thorium is also used in photoelectric cells and X-ray tubes and in certain alloys. Thorium is used as catalytic agent for various processes. Amongst thorium salts, thorium nitrate is used largely in the manufacture of incandescent gas mantles. Mesothorium, the chief radioactive element recovered as a by-product in the chemical treatment of monazite, is marketed usually in the form of its bromide and used in self-luminous paints or enamels. Mesothorium is also used in the treatment of certain types of cancer and skin diseases.

The total consumption of rare earths in 2013-14 to 2015-16 was estimated at 31.18 tonnes, 30.49 tonnes and 31.90 tonnes, respectively. Research and Development was the main consumer accounting for about 85% of the total consumption followed by Glassware (12%) in 2015-16 (Table- 4).

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**Table – 4 : Consumption of Rare Earths, 2013-14 to 2015-16  
(By Industries)**

(In tonnes)			
Industry	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
<b>All Industries</b>	<b>31.18</b>	<b>30.49</b>	<b>31.9</b>
Paints Driers/Pigments	-	-	-
Cinema Arc Carbon	-	-	-
TV Colour picture tube	0.93	1.59	0.9
Glass/Optical polishing	0.09	0.09	0.09
Glassware decolouring	3.9	2.25	3.9
R&D and others	26.26	26.56	27.01

*Source: Department of Atomic Energy, Mumbai.  
Industry-wise consumption of minerals in India, IREL.*

## WORLD REVIEW

The total world reserves are estimated at 121 million tonnes of rare earth oxides (REO) of which China alone accounts for 44 million tonnes followed by Brazil and Vietnam (18% each) and Russia (15%) (Table- 5).

China holds the leading position among producers of rare earth with 140 thousand tonnes. The other major producers are Australia, USA, Russia, Malaysia and Vietnam (Table-6). Concentrates/partially processed intermediate products are further processed at many locations in Europe, USA, Japan and China.

In China, the principal production centres of rare earths are located at Baotou, Inner Mongolia and in Jiangxi & Sichuan provinces. At Baotou, bastnaesite is recovered as a by-product of iron ore mining while in Sichuan and in Gansu, bastnaesite occurs as primary mineral. In Jiangxi, Guangdong, Hunan and Jiangsu provinces, the ion adsorption clays are the source of the greater proportion of world yttrium production.

The Russian rare earths industry is based on loparite, a titanium-tantalum niobate mined from Lovozero massif in the Murmansk region. Rare earth minerals have been recovered as by-products from titanium-bearing heavy sands, particularly in Australia and from tin dredging in Malaysia.

**Table – 5 : World Reserves of Rare Earths  
(By Principal Countries)**

(In '000 tonnes of REO content)	
Country	Reserves
<b>World: Total(rounded)</b>	<b>121060</b>
Australia	3400
Brazil	22000
Canada	830
China	44000
Greenland	1500
India	6900
Malaysia	30
Malawi	140
Russia	18000
South Africa	860
Vietnam	22000
USA	1400

*Source: Mineral Commodity Summaries, 2018*

**Table – 6 : World Production of Rare Earths  
(By Principal Countries)**

(In tonnes)			
Country	2013	2014	2015
Australia	970	3965	8799
China <sup>(e)</sup> (#)	95000	140000	140000
Malaysia	229	292	365
Russia <sup>(e)</sup>	1443	2134	2312
USA	3300	3240	2460 <sup>e</sup>
Vietnam <sup>(e)</sup>	100	100	100

*Source: World Mineral Production, 2011-2015.*

*# Includes production from iron ore extraction, bastnaesite concentrates and ion adsorption clays.*

## **FUTURE OUTLOOK**

China is the world leader in rare earth oxide supply comprising 90% of the global market. The demand for rare earths is centered around countries which manufacture high tech goods and components like automotive catalyst systems, fluorescent lighting tubes and display panel. The

demand, therefore, is expected to emanate mainly from Europe, USA, Japan, China and Republic of Korea. China dominates the entire global supply. Mine restructuring and other policies are responsible for determining prices of rare earths which are almost manifold since 2009 due to panic buying globally.

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