Zimbabwe Freezes Critical Minerals Exports Indefinitely

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Zimbabwe on Wednesday announced an immediate and indefinite ban on the export of all critical minerals – including shipments "in transit" – as the government said it would evaluate the status of the sector.

The directive applies across a mining sector that underpins a significant portion of Zimbabwe's export earnings. By including material already in transit, the order signals that the restriction is comprehensive and immediate.

Zimbabwe is one of Africa's most mineral-rich jurisdictions. It is widely recognized for its platinum group metals (PGMs), hosted along the 550-kilometre Great Dyke geological formation. The country holds the world's second-largest known platinum reserves after South Africa. Operating mines such as Unki and Mimosa produce platinum, palladium and rhodium – metals essential to catalytic converters, hydrogen technologies and electronics.

The country is also a major chrome (chromium) producer. Zimbabwe's Great Dyke hosts some of the highest-grade chromite deposits globally. Chrome is critical for stainless steel production and high-temperature alloys. Ferrochrome smelting operations have historically supplied Asian markets, particularly China.

In recent years, Zimbabwe has become a significant African lithium supplier. The Bikita mine, one of the world's oldest lithium operations, produces spodumene concentrate used in lithium-ion batteries. The Arcadia project, developed near

Harare, has further positioned Zimbabwe as a growing participant in global battery supply chains. Lithium exports have risen sharply amid electric vehicle demand growth.

Zimbabwe also produces nickel, primarily from operations such as Bindura. Nickel is used in stainless steel and increasingly in battery chemistries including nickel-manganese-cobalt (NMC) cathodes.

Gold remains a major export commodity, although not typically classified as a “critical mineral” in Western government lists. Coal and iron ore also contribute to domestic industrial supply.

Emerging sectors include rare earth elements (REEs) and cesium-bearing pegmatites. The historic Kamativi mine has drawn renewed attention for lithium and associated minerals, including potential cesium occurrences within lithium-cesium-tantalum (LCT) pegmatites. While Zimbabwe is not currently a commercial cesium producer, geological potential exists.

By halting exports across all critical minerals — without exemptions and without a defined duration — the government’s decision directly affects producers, processors, traders, and international buyers reliant on Zimbabwean supply. The inclusion of goods already “in transit” introduces immediate contractual and logistical implications.

Zimbabwe has previously articulated policy objectives aimed at increasing domestic beneficiation and local value addition rather than exporting raw materials. The current freeze extends across commodities and suggests a broader sector review rather than a single-metal intervention. With lithium, PGMs and chrome forming the backbone of Zimbabwe’s mineral exports, the practical consequences of an indefinite suspension will depend on both duration and enforcement clarity. Until further guidance is issued, regional and global supply chains incorporating

Zimbabwean output face a period of uncertainty.