

BURKINA FASO

By Blaise Zida

Burkina Faso has experienced democratic rule for 15 years but, since 1999, the second chamber of parliament has been dissolved as it had only served in a consultative role to the national assembly of deputies. In order to bring a greater degree of democracy and more involvement of the people of Burkina Faso, a new organisational structure is being established, La Conférence Générale de la Nation (COGN) which will represent the interests of civil society, producers, local communities, religious groups and public administrators.

A ballot was held on May 5, 2002 to establish the legislative assembly of the Fourth Republic, with 30 political parties set to contest 111 seats. For the past five years, the party of President Blaise Compaore, the CDP, has held the majority of seats in the assembly, and during 2000 most of the opposition had chosen to stay away. On May 5, 2002 the CDP won 57 seats and the opposition 54.

Culture and sport are important aspects of Burkinabe society and every two years the Ministry of Culture organises Semaine Nationale de la Culture - National Culture Week. Last year, the event was held in Bobo-Dioulasso, the economic capital of the country and there were participants from all over the country.

Agriculture and livestock are Burkina Faso's principal economic activities. Cotton represents 40% of the national income and 60% of export receipts. In 2001, the cotton crop was successful and, with production reaching 400,000 t from an annual level nearer 150,000 t in recent years, a significant tonnage was exported. In terms of the quality of its cotton, Burkina Faso ranks fourth in the world after the US, Greece and Pakistan. The government is giving priority to agriculture and is hoping to achieve a transition from

subsistence farming to modern commercial agriculture. At present, 80% of the predominantly rural population is involved in farming, primarily in the cultivation of millet, sorghum, groundnut, sesame and rice, as well as cotton.

The mining and minerals sector was relatively quiet during 2001, mainly because of low international metal prices, especially for gold. A number of foreign mining companies reduced their exploration activities and some even abandoned their mining titles. There were some positive developments to report, however. In August, Johannesburg-based Metorex Ltd announced that the government had agreed to the broad terms of a memorandum of understanding concerning the Perkoa zinc property which the company is considering re-opening. Signing of the MoU forms the basis of a mining lease and Metorex expects the final feasibility study to take about 12 months to complete. Perkoa possesses indicated resources of 6 Mt averaging 18% Zn, and inferred resources totalling 880,000 t at 14.8% Zn.

One of the few active explorers in Burkina Faso during 2001 was Semafo Inc. Early in the year, the Montreal-based company announced the discovery of a significant auriferous structure on its Mana gold property located some 200 km west of Ouagadougou. The new discovery, Wona, lies about 7 km south of the Nyafé gold prospect and, similarly, occurs in Birimian greenstones. There is an indicated resource at Nyafé of 1 Mt at 8.5 g/t Au. Mineralisation at Wona is associated with highly-deformed acidic tuffs, locally silicified with quartz veinlets. Drilling during the year indicated a resource at Wona of at least 3.46 Mt at 2.28 g/t Au, using a 0.5 g/t Au cut-off grade. The structure is open along strike and drilling has encountered mineralisation to a depth of at least 100 m.

A third deposit, Maoula, about 3 km from Nyafé, was announced in mid-year. It comprises two mineralised structures with strike lengths of about 300 m. The most significant intersection in the course of a reverse-circulation drilling programme was 9 m at 12.69 g/t Au from a depth of 20 m. Semafo's exploration programme at Mana has been designed by geologists from Managem, the mining subsidiary of the ONA Group, a Moroccan conglomerate. Managem has a controlling interest in Semafo.

In mid-year, Orezone Resources Inc. of Canada acquired the Seguenega gold property from Repadre Capital Corp. The property has been explored extensively in recent years by two other Canadian companies, Golden Knight Resources and Placer Dome Inc. Elsewhere, Orezone completed a 1,000 m reverse-circulation drilling programme on the Intiedougou gold property to follow up previously identified gold mineralisation in the Peksou zone, believed to be the altered contact between volcanic and intrusive rocks. The more significant intersections included 6 m averaging 24.7 g/t Au from 26 m and 22 m averaging 11.4 g/t Au from a depth of 22 m. The drilling was funded by Orezone's jv partner, Delta Gold Ltd, which is earning a 50% interest in the property and also in the Tomena property.

At the start of 2001, Placer Dome Exploration announced that it would be terminating its agreement with Solomon Resources to acquire the latter's interest in the Bombore, Soubeiga and Naobe gold exploration properties. Solomon would revert to the 45% holding it had earned in the joint venture with Channel Resources prior to its agreement with Placer. Previous drilling had outlined a resource of 35 Mt averaging 1.1 g/t Au at Bombore, including a 22.2 Mt oxide resource averaging 1.5 g/t Au. Further drilling to upgrade the oxide resource is planned.

In August, there was disappointing news from Randgold Resources when it announced that its partner in the Sanmatenga gold joint

venture, Delta Gold Ltd, had withdrawn from the project. Delta had had an option to earn a 50% interest by spending US\$4.25 million over five years. Randgold believes that further drilling is required at Sanmatenga in order to evaluate the property fully.

In mid-year, Ranger Minerals Ltd of Australia announced its withdrawal from the Essakan gold project in northeastern Burkina Faso after spending some A\$3.2 million on exploration. It had an option to earn a 50% interest and had completed a resource modelling exercise. Ranger's consultant, Hellman and Schofield Pty Ltd, estimated a drill-indicated resource of 23.7 Mt at an average grade of 1.99 g/t Au, using a 1.0 g/t Au cut-off grade. The gold occurs in quartz vein sets within a stockwork. Ranger's partner in Essakan, Coronation International Mining Corp., retains a 100% interest in the property.

There was little news from Cluff Mining plc concerning the planned feasibility study for its Kalsaka gold project although, in July 2001, it announced that a share placement in London had raised net proceeds of £5.3 million, part of which would be used to fund the study.

The Ministry of Quarries and Energy (MCE) continued its efforts to promote mining during 2001 and was involved in a number of collaborative projects. Thus, for example, under a framework agreement, the Bureau des Mines et de la Géologie du Burkina (BUMIGEB) and the Bundesanstalt für Geowissenschaften und Rohstoffe (BGR) of Germany, organised a three-day international workshop in early December in Ouagadougou on the potential for volcanogenic massive sulphide (VMS) deposits in the Palaeoproterozoic of western Africa. The BGR, in co-operation with BUMIGEB, Metorex, and various geological survey organisations in western Africa, presented the results of 30 months of base metals research.

The objective of the workshop, which was sponsored by the German Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development

(BMZ), was to encourage exploration, mining development and metallogenic research in the region. Among the topics presented were:

- the exhalative, subvolcanic and plutonic perspective, and a general survey of the Birimian and its significance for VMS exploration;
- the geology of the Perkoa zinc deposit;
- the significance of manganese deposits for VMS exploration in the Birimian;
- the significance of iron-ore deposits for VMS exploration, with particular reference to the Falémé deposit in Senegal;
- the significance of gossans in the exploration for zinc, lead and copper in west Africa;
- geochemical exploration in Burkina Faso at a scale of 1:200,000;
- base metals exploration in Niger since 1985.

Burkina Faso covers an area of 274,000 km² and, since 1999, a systematic programme of geological mapping has been carried out on a scale of 1:200,000. To date, almost one-third of the country has been covered. The project is being financed under the EU-funded SYSMIN and is being carried out by the MCE, BRGM of France, BUMIGEB and the University of Ouagadougou (Department of

Geology), aided by technical assistance from the Belgian consultancy Bugeco. The project also involves the preparation of a geological data base and the updating of a mineral occurrence map at a scale of 1:1,000,000. Field work was completed in March 2002. To complement the project, the MCE and BUMIGEB have geologically mapped the Dédougou, Douentza, Arly and Kandi degree squares at a scale of 1:200,000.

Within the framework of the government's economic development policy and its fight against poverty, much effort is being devoted to promoting small-scale mining or artisanal activity in the exploitation of gold, and the extraction of industrial minerals for local use. MCE and BUMIGEB are involved and also the UNDP. The support programme starts with technical, socio-economic and environmental studies directed mainly at artisanal gold-mining sites (which number around 200). The studies are undertaken jointly by PRECAGEME with its technical partner Geoman Team Ltd of Ghana, and the pilot project is carried out by BRGM in co-operation with BUMIGEB. The long-term objective of the programme is to set out an action plan that will lead to the integration of small-scale gold mining within the local economic fabric.

Also within the framework of its policy for economic development and the fight against poverty, the government (in co-operation with the UNDP) is drawing up an inventory of useful substances and building materials.