

SOMALIA

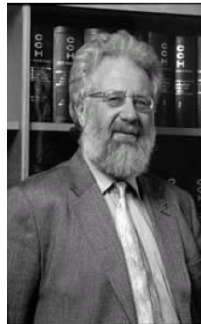
By Geoff Blackburn, Consulting Geologist

Somalia is one of Africa's poorest countries. Located in the 'Horn of Africa', it separates Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. Since the 1991 collapse of the central Somali Government based in Mogadishu, the country's development has been derailed by the lack of any cohesive government. On May 18, 1991, the former British Protectorate of Somaliland in the north declared itself an autonomous nation, with its capital at Hargeisa, completely independent of the former Italian colony of Somalia in the south, with its capital at Mogadishu. Since that time the self-proclaimed Somaliland Republic has instituted a semblance of democratic order with a central government whereas the southern part has remained the provenance of competing factional (Clan-based) interests.

Somaliland presidential elections (originally scheduled for late 2002) were delayed owing to the untimely death of the then President Egal on the operating table in Cape Town. These elections were eventually held in April 2003 with the acting President, Dahir Riyale Kahin being elected to the Presidency. The smooth transition to power following President Egal's death and the calm state of the nation during the subsequent presidential elections is extremely encouraging for future stability, economic growth and mineral exploration.

In contrast, the situation in the former Italian colony of Somalia, centred on Mogadishu, is still without any sign of coherent government and weapons are visually abundant. This situation makes it hard to envisage any serious economic growth with concomitant mineral and oil exploration taking place.

Despite the practical collapse of the Arta initiative, the Somali Peace process, driven by the Arab States, continues. The current round of meetings, being held in Kenya, are perpetually on the verge of collapse, due to internal squabbling and it is difficult to see what chance of real success they could



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have in any event when the popularly elected government of Somaliland is excluded.

The Somaliland Republic has implemented a ministerial style of government in the northern part of Somalia and this includes a Ministry for Mineral and Water Resources. A new mining code for the Somaliland Republic was promulgated in 1996. This mining code provides for the grant of Exclusive Prospecting Licences (EPL) and includes provision to convert the EPL into a Mining Lease.

The Somali economy is very poorly developed, by world standards. The cash/export economy is dominated by the export of livestock (60% sheep, 34% goats with camels and cattle making up the remainder) to neighbouring countries. The country has a high ratio of foreign trade to gross domestic product, a low level of monetisation and a dominant informal trade sector. More than 70% of the population live a nomadic existence that depends on pastoral pursuits for their subsistence.

Prior to the break-up of the country in 1991, there was a small mining industry that exploited limestone, gypsum, sepiolite and sea salt for local markets.

Basement rocks are exposed in two areas. The largest exposure is located almost wholly in the northern Somaliland Republic extending across into Puntland, while another small inlier, the Bur Complex, is located west of Mogadishu in southern Somalia.

Interest in mineral production within these basement rocks currently resides with the discovery and artisanal production of gemstones such as emerald, aquamarine, sapphire, zircons and amethyst. Also attracting interest is the small-scale production of columbite-tantalite ('coltan') from the Henweina Valley and the Bur Mado districts in the Somaliland Republic. Columbite had been discovered previously by the British Geological Survey and exploited in a small way in 1955-58. A Prospecting Licence for the exploration and possible development of the Henweina Valley tantalite occurrences was issued to a Djibouti-based company in February 2003.

Tin-tantalum deposits located at Dalan and Manja-Yihan in Puntland, which were exploited previously by Technoexport Bulgaria during the 1970s, have been stated to contain resources of 1.4 Mt at 0.13% Sn, 150 g/t Ta, with significant rubidium and cesium.

Progressive Interventions, a Dublin-based non-governmental organisation, continues to work with the Somali people and with the Somaliland Mines Department providing advice, seminars and training on various aspects of mineral exploration, and is working towards the establishment of a local gemstone mining industry.

The presence of simpsonite (a high-grade calcic aluminium tantalate) in heavy mineral sands deposits developed along the beaches east of Berbera implies the presence of undiscovered tantalum resources in the adjacent basement.

These areas of basement have significant potential for the discovery of economically important base and precious metal deposits. The northern basement complex consists of a series of high-grade metamorphic rocks which enclose at least two greenstone belts that are known to contain evidence of volcanogenic gold-rich base metal deposits. A number of layered and zoned mafic/ultramafic intrusive complexes are known, and stream sampling has delineated platinum group metal anomalies associated with these igneous complexes. This exploration potential is mirrored by the exploration interest in similar Pre-Cambrian Pan African terranes located across the Gulf of Aden in Yemen, where greenstone belts and younger volcanic-arc sequences are being explored for structurally-controlled gold deposits (Medden) and gold-rich volcanogenic base metal sulphide deposits. In the southern Somalian or Bur Basement complex, located west of Mogadishu, previous exploration has outlined some low-grade iron-ore resources at Bur Galan (indicated resource to 200 m depth of 394 Mt at 38.7% Fe) and Dahimir (indicated resource of about 30 Mt at a similar grade). There is also a small uranium (carnotite) deposit, with a reported indicated resource varying between 10-25 Mt at 0.07-0.08% U_3O_8 . Phosphate (apatite) occurrences are relatively widespread in the calc-silicate rocks of the region. At Modu-Mode grades averaging 24% P_2O_5 have been located.

Despite the very prospective nature of the basement geology, serious mineral exploration will probably have to wait until the political future of the country has been resolved. Despite the semblance of government achieved in the breakaway northern province as the self-declared Somaliland Republic, mineral explorers will probably be reluctant to spend serious funds there until that government achieves more widespread international recognition.