

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. At the national elections of the Somaliland Republic, held in February 1997, the current President of the Somaliland Republic, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal was re-elected for a second five-year term that expires in 2002. To complicate matters further, in May 1998, the eastern portion of Somaliland combined with the northern portion of the former Italian Somaliland declared their autonomy as the Somali State of Puntland, with their own government based in Garoowe.

In mid 2000, Djibouti's President Guelleh convened the Somali National Peace Conference (SNPC) at Arta. This conference essentially created a Somali Government in Exile which appears to have minimal support within the country as the process appears to have excluded the governing bodies of the Republic of Somaliland and Puntland.

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 an EPL into a Mining Lease.

The Somali economy is, by world standards, very poorly developed. The cash/export economy is dominated by the export of livestock (60% sheep, 34% goats, and 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.



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

Over the past year or so, the Dublin-based non-governmental organisation, Progresssive Interventions, has been working with the Somali people to establish a gemstone mining industry, and it has also been evaluating the possibilities of introducing various small prospecting schemes aimed at high-value, low -bulk minerals such as tantalite and gold. 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 rocks.

These areas of basement rocks 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 the similar Pre-Cambrian Pan African terranes located across the Gulf of Aden in the 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 (the indicated resource to a depth of 200 m is 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% U₃O₈. Phosphate (apatite) occurrences are relatively widespread in the calc-silicate rocks of the region. At Modu-Mode grades averaging 24% P₂O₅ 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 formal widespread international recognition.