

NIGER

*By David Knopf, Consultant Geologist
Assisted by Zara Soumana, Niamey*

Niger has approximately 9.8 million inhabitants and covers an area of 1.3 million km². President Mamadou Tandja was elected in 1999, and his government is credited with an economic upturn and the civil servant salaries being paid on schedule.

Niger's economy is centred on subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry and uranium deposits. Uranium exports financed 70% of the national budget during the 1970s but falling prices have seen the contribution from uranium shrink drastically.

Several companies hold mineral exploration licences in the Liptako region, namely AGMDC, Ashanti, Etruscan, Carlin, Geofrica, Geoservice, Managem, Sati and Zaruma. The Samira Hill and Libiri gold project is being developed by AGMDC, owned by Etruscan and Semafo; Managem, the mining arm of Morocco's ONA Group, and a major shareholder of Semafo, is acting as project operator. The Koma Bangou goldfield, which was the subject of a feasibility study by the Etruscan-Onarem joint venture in 1996, is now mined by artisans and the village of Koma Bangou now has 30,000 inhabitants, with many of the facilities of a large town.

In the Liptako region, artisans produced only (a reported) 820 oz of gold in 2000. Elsewhere in the country, 22 t of tin were produced in 2000. Exploration licences for tin and phosphate were granted recently to Diougou Sangare and Sonimex, respectively.

There are two main uranium mines, Akouta and Arlit, in the north of Niger, operated by the French company Cogema. Their uranium production amounted to 2,890 t in 2000. Uranium exploration licences are held by Cogema, Irsa-Onarem and Onarem. In the same region, Sonichar operates an open-cast coal mine at Anou-Anarem, on the western edge of the Air Massif, which produced 158,200 t of coal in 2000.

Three petroleum exploration licences are held by foreign companies. Exxon outlined a resource of some 300 Mbbl in the Agadem area, and is going to resume work in order to increase the reserves. Hunt Oil is evaluating the results of its 2000 drilling programme in the Djado area. TG-World did not carry out any exploration work on its Tenere area. Four other areas are being offered for licencing by the government.