

GUYANE (FRENCH GUIANA)

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A curious combination of the space age and stone age with a population ranging from technicians and Hmong farmers to indigenous people in the interior, Guyane is dominated by its thinly populated rainforests which swallow all but the coastline. Much of the interior is only accessible by river travel with a few authorised landing strips. As a *Departement* of France since 1946 this small country with a population of only 167,982 (July 1999 estimate) has an economy tied closely to that of France, through mining laws, imports and subsidies, which also afford a relatively high standard of living regionally. Fishing and forestry are the most important economic activities other than the French space centre at Kourou, and sugar cane is the major cash crop.

Gold and diamonds have sparked interest, as the Guiana Shield hosts both. Gold has been mined at a number of placer sites in the interior since 1853 with most exported to France. The value of production has amounted to about 4% of the total GDP of almost US\$900 million. Franc-Or Resources experienced some regulatory delays in the past with the local administration, but initiated small-scale production from the Haute-Mana mining gold concessions. Golden Star and its 73%-owned subsidiary Guyanor Resources hold significant gold and diamond exploration interests in the region; the former has a 30% equity interest in the Omai gold mine in Guyana and continues to evaluate with partner Cambior options for the Gross Rosebel gold project in Suriname. Guyanor also holds interests in the Yaou, Dorlin, Paul-Isnard and St-Elie gold properties as well as the Dachine diamond property in Guyane.

Last autumn, Guyanor and Golden Star announced results from the bulk-sampling

programme undertaken by Guyanor and its joint venture partner Rio Tinto on the Dachine diamond project. The programme was designed to sample a large volume of material from various zones of the Dachine ultramafic body to yield a parcel of diamonds in order to confirm the presence of gem quality stones. The partners installed a plant that processed 547.85 t (dry) of weathered diamond-bearing rock and produced 15.95 t (dry) of concentrate that was forwarded to the Nomos laboratory in Brazil for final diamond recovery and evaluation. Diamonds were found in 18 out of 23 samples processed. Using a cut-off size of 1 mm, grades varied from 0.06 to 10.48 ct/100 t. The largest stones were found in the 1.7 to 2.36 mm size range, with an average weight of 0.066 ct. However, the majority of the stones occurred in the ranges of 1 to 1.18 mm and 1.18 to 1.70 mm. Often intensely re-absorbed, they were often also masked by large quantities of inclusions; colours varied from white to light brown and rarely greenish/yellow while the dominant shapes were irregular, with small quantities of cubic and octahedral stones. Since the results were considered disappointing, no further project work was planned at the time and Rio Tinto advised Guyanor that, given the results obtained, it intended to withdraw from the project and terminate the joint venture. Guyanor will probably continue evaluating the remaining targets in the region, notably Vitoria and Palofini, where diamonds were found early last year and a new exploration permit was applied to cover those areas.

This January was more encouraging, however, as Guyanor and Golden Star announced that a Heads of Agreement was concluded between Guyanor and Rio Tinto with respect to the Paul Isnard gold project. The area covered includes eight concessions

held by Sotrapmag, a fully controlled Guyanor subsidiary, and the western part of an exploration permit held by Guyanor in western Guyane, covering 216 km². The first year programme envisions further evaluation of the known gold deposit at Montagne d'Or, as well as new exploration to define the potential of the historic Elysee prospect where Guyanor recently obtained significant gold intersections in trenches and adits.

Although Guyane depends on imports for its other mineral requirements, especially cement and fuels shipped through the port at Cayenne, sand and stone are consumed by

the local construction industry. Sand is dredged from the major rivers, mainly the Mahury and Maroni in the west and stone has been quarried at Cayenne and to the southeast of Kourou. The Ministry of Industry's Direction Regionale de l'Industries, de la Recherche et de l'Environnement (DRIRE) is responsible for the minerals exploration permitting process, assessing applications, and awarding titles, so a referral from DRIRE to the Bureau de Recherches Geologiques et Minieres (BRGM) of France is necessary for access to public records of geological mapping and mineral inventory studies.