

Sudanese officials let newspaper resume printing
KHARTOUM // A pro-government Sudanese newspaper resumed publication yesterday after authorities ordered it to shut down a week ago when its editor called for a senior politician from the main party in the south to be killed. The Arabic-language *Al Wifaq* daily is an Islamist-leaning publication close to the National Congress Party of the president, Omar al Bashir. - Reuters

Journalists flee amid continued Somali violence
KHARTOUM // At least two journalists in Somalia have been killed this year and three injured covering fighting between the government and armed militia, according to Amnesty International. Several journalists have fled after receiving death threats. Amnesty said yesterday. Last year 30 journalists were detained, another 30 received threats and two were killed. - Bloomberg

Mines give poor a golden opportunity

'Life has really changed in this area'

Burkina Faso says it could become Africa's fourth-largest gold producer as prosperity takes root in impoverished villages

Kate Thomas

Foreign Correspondent

OUAGADOUGOU // In 2007, the UN ranked Burkina Faso, a cotton-dependent country, the seventh poorest in the world. A few months later the government discovered it was sitting on reserves of at least 120 tonnes of gold.

In the past two years, four industrial foreign-owned mines have begun production; two more are to open this year. The government says its nascent gold industry could dramatically improve the economy of this landlocked West African country. Two hundred kilometres from the capital city is the village of Youga. Until the diggers and excavators appeared on the horizon two years ago, the tallest thing in Youga was an ancient baobab tree, its bark gnarled and twisted from the oppressive heat.

Souga Doupoaka, 12, used to call the mining equipment "aliens". But she understands the importance of the aliens; they allow her to go to school. "Until they appeared, my family didn't have money," she said. "But now my uncle has a job and he's able to pay my school fees."

Ki Seka, director of the government's bureau of mines, geology and quarries, said Burkina Faso has the potential to become a great gold-producing nation. "If things continue as they are, we can become the fourth-biggest producer of gold in Africa, after South Africa, Ghana and Mali. It's a good recipe for improving the country and the lives of ordinary people, especially since the

price of cotton has fallen in the global economy crisis."

Burkina Faso produced 5.38 tonnes of gold in 2008, a figure that is expected to quadruple in the next few years. About 200,000 people are employed in the industrial and artisanal mining sectors and gold is fast becoming the country's No 2 export after cotton.

The Burkinabé government, which takes a 10-per-cent stake in all gold profits, has applied to become a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which requires governments to disclose extractive earnings. Although Burkina Faso's government is ranked favourably by Transparency International's anti-corruption index, people living in mining areas say improvements in everyday life are coming largely from interaction with foreign investors.

Hugged by the White Volta River, Youga is one of the largest gold mines operating in Burkina Faso. Owned by Etruscan, a Canadian company, it spans 100 sq km and employs 250 staff, 100 of whom come from nearby villages. Among them is Augustin Soné, a pit technician responsible for conducting the frequent blasts that loosen the rock.

"The first time I saw the mine, it was very strange. I'd never before seen any kind of project on this scale. I was used to the tiny artisanal mines you sometimes see in this area. But none of those mines were able to offer me a good job," he said, loosening his hard hat in the 45-degree heat.

Youga's five pits produce 88,000 ounces of gold a year, which is flown to Europe and North America and eventually sold in the jewellery shops of Vienna and Las Vegas.

"Social responsibility is a big part of our work. We hope to improve the quality of life in every part the world we work in. That includes hiring local staff and improving access to education. Livestock farming used to be the main way of life here. These days I think the people with their mine salaries keep the mini economy in nearby villages going," said Peter Mawhinney, the Youga mines superintendent for Etruscan.

Gold fever may not yet have transformed Burkina Faso, but it has certainly changed Youga village. Before Souga and her friends were able to attend school, they would teach themselves basic sums, scratching times tables into the leathery



Mahmoud Nanga watches over the gold mine near Youga, about 200km south-east of Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou. Photographs by Olivier Asselin for The National



Souga Doupoaka, 12, used to call mining equipment "aliens", but she says she understands the wages her relatives earn at the mine pay for her school fees.



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green bark of palm trees. Last year Etruscan paid for a larger, better-equipped primary school, and the headmaster, Dogo Essaie Guuba, says enrolment has since accelerated.

"There are three reasons why we now have more children coming to school; firstly, many of their parents have jobs at the mine to pay the school fees. There are also more

desks and books to go around. And thirdly, children's parents are mixing with highly trained engineers and technicians at the mine. They would never have had the opportunity to meet these kinds of people before. It's hard enough to find transport to the nearest town from here, let alone to the capital city - and they're beginning to understand the importance of education.

My only worry is what will happen when the mine closes," he said.

Most gold mines have a lifespan of five to seven years. Operations at Youga are expected to cease by 2014. But Gamba Issouf, a 24-year-old electrician, is not worried. "Life has really changed in this area. Whereas people had once made barely 1,000 Communauté Financière Africaine francs (Dh7) a day,

now some are earning upwards of 3,000 francs.

"I'm learning about electricity so I can take the techniques and use them elsewhere. The mine will eventually close, but that doesn't mean I'll lose out. The techniques I learn here will stay with me; I'll have them with me for the rest of my life."

✉ kthomas@thenational.ae

Bankrupt Zimbabwe tells state schools to cut fees

Many parents cannot pay as western aid fails to materialise

Cris Chinaka

HARARE // The Zimbabwean government has ordered all state schools to slash their fees as it struggles with an economic crisis desperately crying out for massive foreign aid, a local official newspaper said yesterday.

Morgan Tsvangirai, the prime minister, told a May Day rally that the unity government he formed with his rival, President Robert Mugabe, in February to try end a political and economic crisis was broke and could not meet union demands for higher wages.

Zimbabwe's *Sunday Mail* newspaper said David Coltart, the education minister, had recommended state schools catering for a majority of Zimbabwean students should cut their fees when they open for a new term tomorrow because many parents could not afford them.

"I cannot divulge the figures at the moment because the government

and deputy prime minister Arthur Mutambara on Monday. However, what we want are substantial cuts," he was quoted as saying.

Mr Coltart was unavailable for further comment. The *Sunday Mail* said the minister was reducing the fees because Zimbabwe had so far failed to get the huge financial aid it needs to repair a shattered economy with a 90 per cent jobless rate.

The Zimbabwean government set school fees in state schools at between US\$20 (Dh73) and \$280 a term two months ago, but many parents have failed to pay, citing low wages and high living costs.

"When the [school] fees were set in March, the assumption was that we would get balance of payments support [to] kick start the economy. But this has not materialised and parents are worse off than before," Mr Coltart said.

On Friday, Mr Tsvangirai said the power-sharing administration his Movement for Democratic Change had formed with Mr Mugabe's Zanu-PF party was bankrupt and unable to raise the current monthly salary of \$100 it is paying its workers to the \$154 being demanded as a minimum wage by unions.

country, Zimbabwe's once sound education system is also wasting away under the economic crisis.

The country's leading Zimbabwean newspaper said the government had to close a year now with broken toilets and without piped water.

State media reported yesterday only 68 students out of 12,000 had fully paid their fees of about \$300 when the college tried to reopen in March, and it was also now appealing for foreign assistance. Zimbabwe said last week it had secured \$400 million in credit lines from African states to revive some of its ailing industries, many operating at below 20 per cent of their capacity.

But analysts say Zimbabwe badly needs billions of dollars from western donors, who are demanding broad economic and political reforms, including ending a new wave of farm invasions by Mr Mugabe's supporters, before they release any huge amounts. Mr Mugabe, 85, Zimbabwe's ruler since independence from Britain in 1980, denies any blame for the southern African country's crisis and says the economy has been sabotaged by "racist" enemies of his seizures of white farms for landless blacks.

Sudan expects major rise in agriculture investment by arid Arab countries

Yara Bayoumy

KHARTOUM // Agricultural investment in Sudan by Arab countries looking to guarantee supplies of such staples as wheat for their people will account for up to 50 per cent of all investment in the country from 2010, a state official said.

Countries in the dry Gulf Arab region as well as Asia that rely heavily on food imports have turned their sights to land investments in many African nations to grow food for their own populations.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Jordan have invested in Sudan for their food security needs since the largest African country enjoys a variable climate and heavy rainfall making it fit for growing wheat, citrus fruit, animal feed and oilseeds.

"Agriculture investment in 2007 represented only three per cent of all investment in Sudan. Now it's much higher, it is 17 per cent and it is rising," Abdul Rahim Ali Hamad, state minister at Sudan's agriculture ministry, said yesterday.

Mr Hamad said that 2008-2009 were mostly "preparatory years", during which investors were still studying opportunities and con-

a dramatic increase in agricultural investment. We expect that it will increase to up to 50 per cent related to all investment in Sudan," Mr Hamad said.

"We said these capital investments were worth about US\$3 billion (Dh11bn) this year, up from \$700 million in 2007."

"In terms of area, in 2010 I expect that five million feddans (2.1 billion hectares) will be used for investment in Sudan, which is about \$7.5bn worth of agricultural investment in 2010-2011 by Arab countries," Mr Hamad said.

Sudan gives investors considerable incentives in those farmland deals, such as allowing input materials to be obtained from outside the country, and they can also reinvest their funds in whatever way they want, Mr Hamad said.

But the African Union has criticised what many Africans have coined as "land-grabbing", saying Africa is giving vast areas of farmland to rich countries without ensuring those on the world's hungriest continent reap any benefit.

Mr Hamad said these investments, which are based on leasing and not buying, have not been "misused" at the expense of Sudan's 40 million people, many of whom live in

"What is available to export in any project is not more than 70 per cent, and 30 per cent is used in the domestic market. That is enough for us in terms of numbers," he said.

"We sign deals with non-Sudanese investments... in a way which assures that the Sudanese citizen is benefiting from them."

Mr Hamad said Sudan needs 2.3 million tonnes of wheat per year and that from next season, which starts in the last week of June, the country would aim to plant 627m hectares to produce 1.7m tonnes of wheat.

"Our plan is to cover all our wheat needs by 2011," he said.

★ Reuters

Much of Sudan receives heavy rainfall, making it fit for growing wheat, citrus and oilseeds