

Afghan minerals may bring 'self sufficiency' within decade

BBC ONLINE

Afghanistan could be self-sufficient within a decade if its mineral resources are properly exploited, its mines minister has told the BBC.

Wahid Shahrani is in London to encourage the world's mining companies to invest in his country.

He says his country has untapped mineral wealth worth in excess of \$3tn.

Mr Shahrani says that mining could move the country from being aid dependent to being self-sufficient in 10 years.

The BBC's Jill McGivering says that Mr Shahrani is on a multi-billion dollar sales tour, trying to drum up bids from the world's mining companies for his country's untapped minerals.

These include vast reserves of oil, gas, copper, gold and lithium. Mr Shahrani sees mining as the country's economic mainstay in the future.

In seven years mining taxes should pay the government \$1bn a year, he says, and within a decade Afghanistan could be self-sufficient.

In an interview with the BBC, Mr Shahrani dismissed critics who argue that such a massive influx of money raises concerns about corruption.

"We have improved our legislation, the procedures have been upgraded and we have been getting a tremendous amount of support from our international partners," Mr Shahrani said.

"In future whatever contracts would be awarded, all the information will be published, to make sure that all the relevant stakeholders, civil society and media and parliament, will have access to the information, to make sure we will have sufficient amount of the safeguards, to make sure that we will achieve the high standards of transparency."

Security is another key concern in relation to exploiting the country's mineral reserves, correspondents say.

The first big projects on offer are in the most secure regions of the country - and the government has promised investors a special mining protection security force.



Bhopal gas victims shout slogans as they stage a protest in front of Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram's residence in New Delhi yesterday, to demand justice for victims of the 1984 tragedy.

Bhopal victims angry over new relief package

AFP, New Delhi

Indian campaigners criticised a new 280-million-dollar government package for victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas disaster on Friday, saying it did not go far enough.

Satinath Sarangi, from the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, said the new measures would not help the children and grandchildren of those affected by the world's worst industrial accident.

The Indian government said Thursday it would double the compensation for families of the dead and others suffering health problems, meaning 45,000 people would receive additional payments.

"We are asking the group of ministers to include second and third generation individuals who suffer from contamination," Sarangi told AFP, referring to continued pollution after the accident and congenital diseases.

"More importantly we want the government to chase Dow Chemical and hold them responsible," she added, referring to the current owner of the company blamed for the catastrophe.

The new package, unveiled more than 25 years after the accident, comes amid public anger over the handling of the disaster by former governments, with pollution and health problems still rife in Bhopal.

The gas leak in December 1984 from a pesticide plant run by US chemical group Union Carbide killed thousands of people instantly and tens of thousands more from its lingering effects over the following years.

Activists complained that the government, advised by a panel of senior ministers who formulated the new policy, had decided the new steps without consulting them.

"We are going to hold rallies everyday in Delhi and around India and we have requested a meeting with the prime minister," said Rachna Dhangra, from the Bhopal Group of Information and Action, an umbrella group for campaigners.

Pak monitors websites for blasphemy

AP, Islamabad

Pakistan will start monitoring seven major websites, including Google, Yahoo and Amazon, for sacrilegious content, while blocking 17 other, lesser-known sites it deems offensive to Muslims, an official said yesterday.

The moves follow a temporary ban imposed on Facebook in May that drew both praise and condemnation in a country that has long struggled to figure out how strict a version of Islam it should follow.

Both the Facebook ban and the move announced yesterday were in response to court orders. The sites to be monitored include Yahoo, Google, MSN, Hotmail, YouTube, Amazon and Bing, said Pakistan Telecommunication Authority spokesman Khuram Mehran.

South Korea raps 'reckless' N Korea at war anniversary

AFP, Seoul

South and North Korea yesterday marked the 60th anniversary of a war that killed millions and officially remains unfinished, accusing each other of fuelling the current high tensions on the peninsula.

At a solemn ceremony in Seoul to commemorate the Korean War's outbreak, President Lee Myung-Bak urged the North to stop its "reckless military provocations" and apologise for the sinking of a South Korean warship.

The three-year conflict, which began with a North Korean invasion, left Korea in ruins and cost close to three million lives by most estimates.

It ended only with an armistice and not a peace treaty, leaving North and South still technically at war six decades later.

The North denies involvement in the sinking which cost 46 lives, and accuses the South of mounting a US-backed smear campaign to fuel tensions. It says planned reprisals could trigger a new war.

Pyongyang insists the 1950-53 war was triggered by provocations from the South and its US ally, which still stations 28,500 troops south of the border.

The North's ruling party newspaper Rodong Sinmun said Friday that peace is still threatened "due to the US and the South Korean puppet forces' vicious moves to provoke a new war".

Lee said the South's ultimate goal is not military confrontation but peaceful reunification. But he reiterated calls for the North to apologise for the sinking of the ship near the tense disputed sea border.

The South, citing the findings of a multinational investigation that the North fired a torpedo, has announced its own non-military reprisals.

Along with the United States, it is also pressing for United Nations Security Council condemnation of the North, which threatens a military response to any UN action.

"North Korea should take a responsible attitude in front of the international community," Lee said in a speech.

"North Korea should stop reckless military provocations and take the path for the 70 million Koreans to live together."

Hundreds of decorated veterans from the South, and from other countries that fought for it in the war, joined families, diplomats and VIPs for the commemoration.

Brazil's Lula cancels trip to G20

AFP, Brasilia

Brazil's president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, has cancelled his planned trip to Canada for this week's G20 summit due to deadly floods in the northeast, a presidential spokesman told AFP yesterday.

Lula had been scheduled to leave for Canada in the afternoon after watching the World Cup match between Brazil and Portugal on television.

Brazil, a regional power often grouped with Russia, India and China, will be represented at the summit by Economy Minister Guido Mantega, who was travelling to Canada, the official said.

At least 51 people were killed in the floods in the northeastern states of Alagoas and Pernambuco that left towns and villages in ruins and an estimated 200,000 people homeless.

Leaders differ on how to nurture a global recovery

AP, Toronto

As world leaders gathered to deal with the aftermath of the global financial crisis, President Barack Obama boasted about a congressional compromise on overhauling the US banking system and called for an international effort to prevent future economic meltdowns.

But Obama was still facing major obstacles in convincing a balky Congress to provide more money to fight high unemployment and many countries were resisting Obama's appeals for continued stimulus spending to support the global economy. They were moving in the opposite direction to raise taxes and cut government programs out of fears of a Greek-style debt crisis.

After meeting through the night in Washington, congressional negotiators cleared the financial overhaul proposal with the help of an administration-brokered compromise on derivatives trading.

The agreement was certain to be a major discussion point as Obama and other leaders of the Group of 20 major economies gathered for three days of talks in Canada. Those discussions were beginning Friday with a session at a resort three hours north of Toronto in Canada's Muskoka lakes region.

"We need to act in concert for a simple reason: This crisis proved and events continue to affirm that our national economies are inextricably linked," Obama said on the White House lawn before leaving for Canada.



A fan places a bouquet in front of a big portrait of Michael Jackson at the foot of the Tokyo Tower, which has a time limitation event to display Jackson collection, in Tokyo yesterday. Some special events were scheduled for the first anniversary of the king of pop's death from an accidental overdose of prescription drugs on June 25 last year.

Baby deaths link to Roman 'brothel' in Buckinghamshire

BBC ONLINE

Archaeologists investigating a mass burial of 97 infants at a Roman villa in the Thames Valley believe it may have been a brothel.

Tests on the site at Hambleden in Buckinghamshire suggest all died at 40 weeks gestation, very soon after birth.

Archaeologists suspect local inhabitants may have been systematically killing unwanted babies.

Archaeologist Dr Jill Eyers said: "The only explanation you keep coming back to is that it's got to be a brothel."

With little or no effective contraception, unwanted pregnancies could have been common at Roman brothels, explained Dr Eyers, who works for Chiltern Archaeology.

And infanticide may not have been as shocking in Roman times as it is today.

Archaeological records suggest infants were not considered to be "full" human beings until about the age of two, said Dr Eyers.

Children any younger than that age were not buried in cemeteries. As a result, infant burials tended to be at domestic sites in the Roman era.

Even so, say experts, the number at the Yewden villa at Hambleden is extraordinary.

"There is no other site that would yield anything like the 97 infant burials," said Dr Simon Mays, a skeletal biologist at English Heritage's Centre for Archaeology, who has been investigating the finds.

The ages of the babies were estimated by measuring the length of the bones. The researchers found these were all of similar size.

Dr Mays believes that this points to systematic infanticide at birth rather than death from natural causes, which would have struck infants at different ages.

The Hambleden site, close to the River Thames, was excavated 100 years ago and identified as a high status Roman villa.

The dig was on a massive scale but is now buried under a wheat field.

But meticulous records were left by a naturalist and archaeologist called Alfred Heneage Cocks.

More than 300 boxes full of artefacts, pottery and bones were recently rediscovered at Buckinghamshire County Museum along with Cocks' original report published in 1921, and a small photo archive.

The records give precise locations for the infant bodies, which were hidden under walls or buried under courtyards close to each other.

Cocks' original report paid little attention to these remains, which are now being tested for the first time by English Heritage.

The team plans to carry out DNA tests on the skeletons in a bid to establish their sex and possible relationship to each other.

They are also trying to uncover any other information, which might suggest a motive for the practice.

Fears of new unrest as Kyrgyz holds referendum

AFP, Bishkek

Kyrgyzstan is to vote in a constitutional referendum Sunday that interim authorities insist is vital for easing tensions after deadly ethnic clashes but that some fear could spark new unrest.

Kyrgyzstan's provisional government, which came to power after former president Kurmanbek Bakiyev was ousted in riots in April, has pushed ahead with the vote despite the violence this month.

At least 264 people were killed in the clashes, according to the health ministry. But officials have admitted that many killed were not registered and have said the real death toll was probably much higher.

The new constitution proposed in the referendum would significantly reduce the powers of the president and make the country Central Asia's first parliamentary republic -- moves the interim government says are essential for stability and fighting top-level corruption.

It will also limit any single political party from holding more than 50 seats in Kyrgyzstan's 90-seat parliament in a bid to prevent the kind of super-majorities that previous leaders enjoyed.

The referendum would set the stage for parliamentary elections that authorities this week moved forward by a month, from October to early September, in an effort to bring in a legitimate government as quickly as possible.

But many in the south, where the clashes earlier this month between the majority Kyrgyz and minority Uzbek populations also forced tens of thousands from their homes, are deeply sceptical of the referendum.

When she travelled to the region to discuss the vote this week, interim leader Roza Otunbayeva was confronted by hundreds of angry protesters demanding the referendum be shelved and a presidential vote held instead.

On Thursday Otunbayeva made an urgent plea for Kyrgyz voters to approve the constitution.

"By saying 'yes' to the new constitution the Kyrgyz people will opt for a fundamental change of the country's political system, for the pre-eminence of the rights of the people and for a responsible State," she said in an address to the nation broadcast by television.

Without the new constitution order cannot be restored, she said, adding, "Destructive forces do not want real changes and tried to fan civil war".

She was also confident that the government would take the necessary steps to stabilize the situation in the south of the country.

But analysts warned the government's decision to go ahead with the vote would raise tensions and could provoke further violence.

"Continuing to hold the referendum in the current difficult circumstances is unrealistic.... The vote should be delayed until later," said Bishkek-based political analyst Karybek Baybosunov.

Israel air raid kills one in Gaza Strip

AFP, Gaza City

Israeli warplanes raided the Gaza Strip overnight killing a Palestinian and wounding another, witnesses and Palestinian medical officials said yesterday.

One man was killed and another was wounded in an air attack on Rafah, in the south part of the territory close to the border with Egypt, the sources said. A third was reported missing.

No casualties were reported in two other overnight air raids, one in the south and the other in the north of the tiny Palestinian territory.

An Israeli military spokesman confirmed the raids, saying "our planes attacked an armoury in the north of the Gaza Strip and two tunnels used for gun running" from Egypt.

"The raids are a reaction to the shelling Thursday from the Gaza Strip of the western sector of the Negev desert" in southern Israel, the spokesman added.