RAINMAKERS & POT STIRRERS

miningmx
higher grade

2024

YOUR GUIDE TO THE
100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE
IN AFRICA'S MINING INDUSTRY

Sponsored by

AngloAmerican

MENAR

FOREWORD BY VUSLAT BAYOĞLU

MD MENAR

Vuslat Bayoğlu is the co-founder of Menar, which has controlling stakes in Canyon Coal, Zululand Anthracite Colliery, Kangra and East Manganese.

The Transnet crisis will be a major deciding factor in how South Africa's bulk commodity exports perform in 2024. In recent years rail and port inefficiencies have caused massive opportunity costs as coal, iron ore and manganese exports dwindled.

The loss of opportunities is a real threat to economic competitiveness as some investors are looking to fund the construction of a rail line to the Namibian port to dodge South Africa's logistics network. The Port of Maputo increased its performance by a record 31.2 million tons in 2023 as more exporters sought alternative routes. A startling 90% of the commodities including coal, phosphate, vanadium, and chromium exported via Maputo came from South African mines.

As if this were not enough, the collision of two trains on the export coal line to Richards Bay in KwaZulu KwaZulu-Natal in January this year, has added more pressure on the system and exposed pre-existing weaknesses in the way Transnet manages its infrastructure. It is estimated that Transnet's inefficiencies cost the economy R1 billion a day.

Transnet and government have their work cut out in securing locomotives, tackling huge debt, dealing with vandalism, and other internal issues that have crippled the state-owned company over the years. Through its ongoing recovery plan Transnet has promised to increase delivery volumes to 193 million tons, translating to a possible profit of R5.2 billion by the 2024/2025 financial year. The ideal situation is to see miners being able to transport commodities like manganese, coal and iron ore via rail instead of road.

Less congestion at the ports will help improve export performance. Government and Transnet's leadership understand the gravity of the problem: the most important step would be to implement measures to give the mining industry confidence that things are taking a turn for the better. Involving private partners will also support Transnet's operations by increasing rail capacity and improving efficiency.

Meanwhile, the green debate will continue to impact discussions around energy, especially after COP28's announcement to triple the world's green energy generation capacity by 2030. The International Energy Agency (IEA) expects the growth on renewables to affect global demand for coal. In 2023 coal demand increased 1.4% but the IEA says the curve could flatten in 2024 and eventually drop 2.6% in 2026. This is based on the projected future growth of renewables in China, a country that consumes half the world's coal.

However, all is not doom and gloom for a resilient sector like mining. The rising demand for copper, lithium and nickel to power green technology could present new opportunities for companies looking to grow their portfolio. Renewable energy experiments will continue alongside demand for reliable and affordable energy, which will be met from tried-and-tested sources.

CONTENTS

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

CHARLOTTE MATHEWS After collecting qualifications ranging from shorthand, typing and bookkeeping to history, economics and journalism, Charlotte started at Business Day as an intern in 1988 and has since covered a wide spectrum of business sectors for different media. She has found the deep and dirty world of mining to be the most interesting.

ED STODDARD Ed Stoddard is a Johannesburg-based journalist with a focus on mining, resources and economic and environmental issues. Hailing from the Canadian province of Nova Scotia, Ed was a Reuters correspondent for 24 years. A regular contributor to the Daily Maverick news site, his work has also appeared in MiningMX, Business Day, the Financial Mail, Undark Magazine, Mother Jones, Salon, Slate and The Atlantic. When not casting around for stories, he likes to cast around with a fly for fish.

LIESL PEYPER Liesl Peyper is a business and political reporter from Cape Town, focusing on mining, trade and industry and infrastructure news. Liesl's work experience includes being personal finance editor at Sake24, parliamentary reporting at Die Burger and Fin24, and teaching English in South Korea. Liesl holds an MPhil (Journalism) degree from the University of Stellenbosch.

BRENDAN RYAN Brendan has been covering mining since 1982, when he joined the Rand Daily Mail. Since those days, he has worked for just about every major publication, covering mining, as well as a number of international mining publications. He intends to continue writing on mining, mainly to fund his travel and wildlife photography addictions.

DAVID MCKAY David joined Business Day in 1996. He was the founding editor of Mineweb in 1999, a director of Moneyweb Holdings, and founding editor of MiningMX in 2004. After selling MiningMX to Media24, he worked as editor of Fin24 and was executive editor of Media24's digital financial publications. He bought MiningMX back in 2013. In addition to MiningMX, David has also written for Finweek and the Financial Mail.

miningmx
higher grade

17th edition

Editor Miningmx:
David McKay

Sub-editing:
Yvonne Fontyn
Andrea Bryce

Artwork & Layout:
Colleen Wilson

Contributors:
Charlotte Mathews
Ed Stoddard
Brendan Ryan
Liesl Peyper
David McKay

E-Book/Online publishers:
Private Label

Printing:
Typo Printing

Rainmakers & Potstirrers is available as an app for download

A version of
Rainmakers & Potstirrers is available online on at www.miningmx.com

All enquiries about editorial and advertising in Miningmx online and its print products should be directed to david@miningmx.com

Miningmx (Pty) Ltd
Address
P.O Box 3194
Rivonia
2128

Email:
david@miningmx.com
info@miningmx.com

RAIN MAKERS & POT STIRRERS

DAVID ANTHONY

CEO

Asante Gold Corporation

www.asantegold.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'It's an exciting and busy time at Asante, with several near-term catalysts on the horizon, most notably the completion of high-return capital projects that are expected to transform the production and cost profile at both of our operations'

DAVID Anthony's ambition to register a 400,000 ounce run rate at West African gold miner Asante by December didn't go quite to plan. Actual gold production is expected to be no more than 245,000 oz, while the targeted run-rate is unlikely, even in the medium term. According to an update late last year, the firm's Bibiani and Chirano operations, both in Ghana, ought to be at 360,000 oz by about end-2024. While this represents impressive production growth, especially from Asante's standing start a few years ago, the market hates missed guidance. Funding seems to be at heart of Asante's issues at present. In September it said it was open to "discussions and potentially interested parties regarding strategic alternatives". This openness to new business didn't extend to 11.43% shareholder Fujairah Holding, however, which in April made an unsolicited offer for Asante. Anthony rejected it out of hand because Fujairah imposed a condition that he suspend its then equity and debt discussions with third parties. Unsettling as this must have been for shareholders, Asante has ploughed on nonetheless, extending the life of its Grasshopper pit at Bibiani mine as part of an accelerated resource definition, and signing a two-year, 90,000 oz hedging agreement in return for $40m in funds. Clearly, Anthony is not the type of miner to hang around: in 2021, Asante bought Bibiani from Resolute Mining for $90m which it quickly followed months later with the $225m cash and shares acquisition of Chirano from Kinross Gold Corp. We wait on the firm's next update with bated breath because whatever course it takes, Asante will be in a big hurry.

LIFE OF DAVID

Prior to Asante Gold, Anthony was head of operations for African Barrick, subsequently renamed Acacia Mining, which ran the Bulyanhulu and North Mara mines in Tanzania. He was also COO for West African gold exploration firm Cardinal Resources, which developed the Namdini mine. The company eventually attracted a $500m buyout by China's Shandong. Anthony also has experience in South America working in Ecuador, Brazil, Chile and Argentina. He is a mining engineer with a BSc from Queen's University in Ontario.

PAUL ATHERLEY

CHAIRPERSON

Pensana

www.pensana.co.uk

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'The fact that FSDEA has requested the right to participate in any future equity raises is a clear endorsement of our business'

SHARES in Pensana, a rare earths development firm, halved in April 2023 after it nearly ran out of money – an event described by Atherley as "a timing mismatch" between cash in and cash out. Such is the life of a start-up miner with big ambitions. Pensana's idea is to develop the Longonjo rare earths resource in Angola and ship the material to custom-built processing facilities in Yorkshire's Saltend. From there it hopes to produce 4,400 tons a year of neodymium and praseodymium (NdPr) oxide, minerals used in magnets for wind turbines. But the $550m capital cost involved proved tough to finance. For two nervy months, Atherley chased a number of 'Plan Bs' including selling a stake in the project to "a major mining house". By June, Atherley landed on an outcome that relies heavily on debt. First, the financing of Longonjo and the Saltend plant have been separately ring-fenced. Second, Longonjo's upfront cost has been lowered by deferring $105m in mostly infrastructure-related capital for three years. The balance of the mine will be financed with $80m from Angola's sovereign wealth fund FSDEA and a $120m project finance loan from Absa, a South African bank. Thirdly, for the Saltend plant, a $150m bond will be supported by Nordic investment bank ABG Sundal Collier. That leaves $100m in outstanding capital for the plant which is yet to be secured. One conclusion to be drawn from the last 12 months in Pensana's life is that new supply of 'battery minerals' is mighty difficult to secure. As if to prove the point, Atherley said the Saltend plant would now cost $250m from $195m previously owing to "inflation and design changes".

LIFE OF PAUL

A mining engineer with a degree from Imperial College, London, Atherley was an executive director at HSBC before establishing grassroots knowledge of Chinese business as chairperson of the British Chamber of Commerce in Beijing, a role he held for a year between 2014 and 2015. After that he worked at Berkeley Energia, an Australian-listed firm working on clean energy resources at a prospect in Spain. He joined Pensana as chairperson in May 2018. Tim George, a former Anglo American executive and former CEO of Xceldiam, was appointed Pensana CEO in 2019.

16-YEAR UNINTERRUPTED DIVIDEND DECLARATION

REWIND

DRDGOLD LIMITED

One of DRDGOLD's focus points is to optimally, profitably and sustainably mine our large surface gold resource. Our key differentiator is our long history of paying dividends to our shareholders.

One of our key objectives is to generate a financial return for our shareholders which we do by maintaining healthy cash flows. This focus on cash flow has enabled us to preserve the value created for stakeholders in the form of dividends for 16 uninterrupted years, making a total distribution of 80 SA cents per share for FY2023.

CREATING VALUE FOR OUR STAKEHOLDERS (2023)

Total value added	Total economic value distributed	Re-invested in the Group
R5 826m	**R4 906m**	**R920m**

VALUE WE CREATED

VALUE CREATED → REVENUE + INCOME FROM INVESTMENTS + INCOME FROM DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY, PLANT AND EQUIPMENT

QUALITY OF STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

We set ourselves the task of pursuing and creating real value for our stakeholders along with defined parameters and outcomes. We continuously measure our performance against our strategic objectives to ensure that we remain on track and that our contribution in this regard remains relevant. Our stakeholder groups' key interests are linked to our business model and strategic objectives and inform the way we manage our business.

DRDGOLD RANKED SECOND IN SUNDAY TIMES TOP 100 COMPANIES 2023 AWARDS AND FIRST IN THE 2020 AWARDS

BERNARD AYLWARD

CEO

Kodal Minerals

www.kodalminerals.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

For evidence of how China has stolen a march on the West in terms of critical minerals production, look no further than AIM-listed Kodal Minerals

FOR evidence of how China has stolen a march on the West in terms of critical minerals production, look no further than AIM-listed Kodal Minerals. First production of Kodal's Bougouni lithium mine in Mali starts this year, which is good going considering the mining licence was only granted in 2021. Kodal's Bernard Aylward, a veteran developer of mines, says Bougouni will provide a springboard for Kodal to kick the tyres on its gold prospects sprinkled throughout West Africa. First, though, the firm has to deliver on construction of a dense media separation plant at Bougouni that will absorb $65m in investment. Those funds were pumped in by Hainan Group, which also took a 14.51% equity stake in Kodal, exceeding the 11.85% stake of Suay Chin. The Singapore headquartered trader has deep contacts in China's chemicals industry, which needs the lithium to drive its thriving electric car industry currently flooding Western markets. After construction of the DMS, Kodal will press on with a flotation plant at Bougouni. An updated feasibility study resulted in a 40% increase in Bougouni's reserves which already had an impressively short payback period of eight months and a nearly 100% return on invested capital. Shares in Kodal have gained 65% over the past 12 months and the expectation can only be of further gains given the medium-term fundamentals for lithium (despite current price pressure). We hear Sibanye-Stillwater's US lithium project might stall on the presence of sensitive buckwheat that could struggle to achieve environmental clearances, while a Donald Trump presidency might unhinge the subsidies allowed to it by President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. And the West wonders why the Chinese are so, so far ahead.

LIFE OF BERNARD

A geologist, Aylward earned his stripes in West Africa's exploration industry, playing a part in the discovery of four deposits in Ghana, as well as a history of successful discoveries in Western Australia. Other postings have seen him dig for metals in Greece and Siberia, locations that couldn't be more different and underpinning the mining truism that you go where the deposit is. He took Taruga Gold through a listing in Australia and was COO for International Goldfields as well as holding down positions at Croesus Mining and Azumah Resources.

VUSLAT BAYOĞLU

MD

Menar Holdings

www.menar.co.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

‘The Transnet situation has to be fixed. We do not have an option here’

VUSLAT Bayoğlu – unsurprisingly because he is a substantial coal exporter – has very strong views on what has to happen at Transnet, so it is going to be interesting to see whether this state-owned organisation with a monopoly on South Africa’s ports and railways can get back on a recovery track this year. Bayoğlu was one of the very few – perhaps the only – coal exporters who publicly disagreed with the Minerals Council South Africa’s move to get Transnet CEO Portia Derby and Transnet Freight Rail CEO Sizakele Mzimela fired. They were both forced out last year, but Bayoğlu’s response was, “We have to work with Portia Derby. What did they achieve by calling for her removal? The Minerals Council was wrong on this one.” Bayoğlu reckons the main problem hamstringing Transnet was the Chinese locomotive contract that happened before Derby’s appointment and was out of her control to fix. So far the jury is out on whether the private business initiative to fix Transnet will deliver increased railage volumes. Bayoğlu reckons the key issue is the new ownership/access agreement that has to be reached between government and the private sector over Transnet. That aside, he remains optimistic on the future of the South African mining industry although perhaps not as gung ho as he was a few years back before Eskom and then Transnet came totally off the rails. He is not really fussed about Eskom because he does not sell coal to the utility, and points out you can sort out your own power supply situation provided you have the money. That’s not the case with Transnet. Bayoğlu started out in coal but has since diversified heavily into manganese and is sizing up a major new underground manganese mine development.

LIFE OF VUSLAT

He’s originally from Erzurum, Turkey, and holds a Bachelor of Applied Science in Mechanical Engineering from Middle East Technical University. He moved to South Africa in 2002 and got involved in the coal sector, eventually creating the Menar group through which he controls his various interests in coal, manganese and other metals. He has built Menar up from junior to mid-tier mining company status. In addition to his own companies, he is also a director of the Richards Bay Coal Terminal and the Future-Coal Global Alliance.

GEORGE BENNETT

CEO

Rainbow Rare Earths

www.rainbowrareearths.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We believe Phalaborwa will continue to be of interest to strategic investors since it will produce all four of the critical rare earths for permanent magnets'

GEORGE Bennett has pushed steadily ahead with the development of the Phalaborwa Rare Earths Project and was rewarded on two key fronts – a recovery in the company's share price and, more importantly, potentially bringing on board a substantial financial backer. That was Brian Menell's TechMet investment company which could take a 15% to 33% stake in the Phalaborwa project after being granted a $50m, three-month option in the venture. TechMet has the backing of the Development Finance Corporation – a US government fund aimed at developing battery minerals in the West. Mercuria, a Swiss-based commodities trading house, is also a shareholder in TechMet. Another big development was that Rainbow Rare Earths increased its stake in the Phalaborwa project to 85% and now has the option to obtain the remaining 15% through the issue of $7m in shares. Management used the recovery in the share price to raise $9.5m in May at a 30% premium to the ruling share price and a further $5.4m in September at a discount of only 3%. Rainbow has also made significant changes to its diversification strategy impairing the Garaka Project in Rwanda and writing off $10.8m in the process. The company has instead opted to invest in the "earlier stage" Uberaba project in Brazil. Uberaba is "similar" to Phalaborwa but would be a larger operation to be developed jointly with partner Mosaic. On the technical side a major development was the recovery of the first mixed rare earth sulphate from the front-end pilot plant in Johannesburg. Put it all together and the Rainbow share price recovered from below 10 pence a share at the end of 2022 to around 15p at end-2023 putting it back at the level where Rainbow carried out its initial fund raise in October 2021.

LIFE OF GEORGE

To call Bennett an "interesting character" would be putting it mildly. He is best known as the founder and CEO of engineering group MDM Engineering which he sold to Amec Foster Wheeler in 2017 for $120m, but Bennett actually started his business career in the "rag trade". That was when he dropped out of his studies at the University of Natal in Durban to get involved in the city's clothing industry which was booming at the time. He then shifted to the stock market, moving to Johannesburg in the mid-1980s and becoming a partner in broking firm Simpson McKie which was subsequently taken over by HSBC. Bennett quit HSBC in 2003 and went gold mining, listing Shanta Gold in London in 2005.


WHAT THE FUTURE NEEDS MOST IS A HEART OF GOLD.
OUR WORK GOES BEYOND JUST MINING GOLD AND GROWING OUR INVESTMENT IN COPPER.
We mine with the future in mind and with the safety of each other a top priority. Whilst the wealth we create depends on what we bring to the surface, our responsibility goes much deeper. We recognise that it is our duty to care for our people and our planet therefore, sustainability is embedded in all we do.
This is the promise we have made to our people, our communities and the countries in which we operate. We put our hearts into keeping this promise.
This is Mining with Purpose.
HARMONY™
MINING WITH PURPOSE
harmony.co.za

DAN BETTS

CEO

Hummingbird Resources

www.hummingbirdresources.co.uk

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'The company has faced challenges ramping up operations at Kouroussa mainly through lower mining productivity rates than planned'

HUMMINGBIRD Resources was "priced to fail" early last year, according to Dan Betts, who described 2022 as "a shit show" following production misses at Yanfolila, its Mali gold mine. Last year, however, was a partial improvement. At the time of writing, the firm's share clawed back some of its losses in 2022 – a performance assisted by a buoyant gold price. But the main driver has been operational consistency at Yanfolila that saw Hummingbird regain its 80,000 to 90,000 ounce production of recent years. The plan to establish Hummingbird as a 200,000 oz/year gold producer has come with birthing pains. In July 2023, Hummingbird poured first gold from its new $120m Kouroussa mine in Guinea and then secured a $55m loan from Coris Bank to bolster the balance sheet while Kouroussa ramped up. The loan took net debt to $122.8m as per the third quarter, a consequence of Kouroussa and the failure of Yanfolila in 2022. Betts pledged to a three-year repayment plan starting with $77m this year. In December 2023, however, Hummingbird returned to the market amid ramp-up delays at Kouroussa with a $30m equity placement of which $25m was cornerstoned by CIG, taking the investment bank's stake in Hummingbird to 45%. Hummingbird also said it would hedge 15% of its forecast gold production for 2024 in an effort to provide some top-line security. The funds are to bolster the balance sheet but $5m has been set aside for exploration, including work at the Dugbe gold project in Liberia. In its December recapitalisation announcement, Hummingbird also said it had exercised an option to flip up its 51% asset level stake in Dugbe to a 51% controlling stake in Pasofino Gold, its Toronto-listed joint venture partner, which has been developing the project.

LIFE OF DAN

Dan Betts' family owns the oldest privately held gold bullion-smelting business in the UK. Founded in 1760, the company has a long history of smelting, refining and trading across the world. Betts himself joined the family firm in 2000, a few years after he graduated from Nottingham University. He went on to found Hummingbird in 2005 with the support of his father, Stephen Betts, who also sits on the board as a non-executive.

JASON BREWER

CEO

Marula Mining

www.marulamining.com

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'If the South African [junior mining] sector was in Australia, half of the 6,000 closed mines would have been reworked. That's a fact'

JASON Brewer could be the breath of fresh air South Africa's junior mining industry desperately needs. Although a lot of his claims are exactly that – claims – his Australian can-do approach will be interesting to witness this year. In essence, Marula plans to build three mines, starting with a lithium operation called Blesberg Lithium in the Northern Cape. Previously a tantalum mine, Marula is mining spodumene, a concentrate financed with a $5m offtake agreement with Traxys, a commodities trader. A copper mine called Kinusi and the Nyorinyori graphite prospect, both in Tanzania, are also in the pipeline. South African investors will get a closer look at Marula when Brewer completes the switch of the firm's AQSE exchange listing to a primary LSE presence as this will include secondary listings in Johannesburg as well as Nairobi, where Marula is headquartered. Brewer is enormously optimistic, even by a junior miner's standards. Half of South Africa's 6,000 closed mines would have been reworked several times had they been in Australia, he declared at a conference in June last year. In addition to the plethora of prospects, South Africa is flush with skills and services ideal to junior mining, he said. Brewer's optimism was best demonstrated in December when the Marula board approved a dividend policy promising to pay out 30% to 35% of free cash flow semi-annually provided there was a £10m cash back-up in the company treasury. Marula is also involved in Neo Energy Metals, which has colourful entrepreneur Quinton van der Burgh's Q Global Commodities Group as an investor. Q Global Commodities Group provided Marula with a £3.75m multi-tranche equity investment as the entrepreneur sought to diversify from his empire in coal.

LIFE OF JASON

Brewer graduated from Imperial College in London with a mining engineering degree and spent 11 years working for heavyweight investment banks including NM Rothschild. He then dived into junior mining, participating in a long list of AIM and Sydney listed firms, many of which had African exposure. His affinity with Kenya developed in a near two-year stint as the commercial director of Caracal Gold followed by a number of others including property and mining firm Gathoni Muchai Investments. He had been CEO of Marula for about two years at the time of writing.

MARK BRISTOW

CEO

Barrick Gold

www.barrick.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

‘When we announced the Barrick deal, I was very clear this is a copper and gold company. The logic is it comes together’

IS this the year when the deal-shy Bristow actually goes ahead and carries out a big M&A deal for Barrick? The outspoken gold executive has positively revelled over the years in trashing everybody else’s deals and stressing that Barrick remains on the one true path to enhancing shareholder value which is through organic growth. His long-held conviction – delivered with all the finesse of an old-school Bible-thumping preacher – is that the market will reward Barrick for replacing production at a cost cheaper than can be achieved in M&A. That’s what he did at Randgold Resources, but it has not happened so far at Barrick in a market where it seems investors are wary of gold equities in general. When gold first went through the $2,000/oz level back in 2020, the Barrick share price hit C$40. Over the past year, during which gold has gone through the $2,000/oz level several times, the Barrick share price has remained around C$25. Barrick’s great rival – Newmont – has followed a similar trend with its share price despite blowing $19.5bn last year on buying Newcrest. That was a deal Bristow described as “puzzling”, stating he had no interest in Newcrest. Bristow has also described Gold Fields’ failed attempt at taking over Yamana as “stupid” while the prior failure to merge AngloGold Ashanti with Gold Fields was a “tragedy”. What may be changing Bristow’s thinking is the rising strategic importance of copper in his future operations. Speculation linked Barrick to a possible play for First Quantum last year while the group is expanding its Lumwana Mine in Zambia and developing the Reko Diq copper-gold mine in Pakistan. Bristow refuses to comment on market speculation so we will just have to wait and see.

LIFE OF MARK

He’s a geologist holding a doctorate from Natal University and owes his career to practising what he preaches on organic growth through exploration. He got his big break through the discovery of the rich Morila deposit in Mali which kick-started Randgold Resources. Despite trashing M&A activity Bristow has proven himself no slouch in this area. He carried out the totally unexpected merger of Randgold with Barrick in 2019 and then followed up with an audacious hostile bid for Newmont. That failed but resulted in the merger of Newmont’s Nevada gold operations with those of Barrick which many believe was what Bristow wanted all along.

ALBERTO CALDERON

CEO

AngloGold Ashanti

www.anglogoldashanti.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

‘The move of our primary listing to the NYSE provides us with improved access to the world’s largest capital market’

LAST year was one of dramatic change for AngloGold Ashanti on Calderon’s watch as the company shifted its primary listing from the Johannesburg to the New York Stock Exchange; its headquarters to Denver, Colorado; and its domicile to the UK. AngloGold still retains a corporate office in Johannesburg. Those developments are all logical – given that AngloGold sold off its last South African mine in 2020 – and they are all key to Calderon’s aim to restore AngloGold to the ranks of elite international gold miners. But material results have yet to be seen in the share price. There has been no swift removal of the so-called South African discount. The stock is marginally up on the NYSE since it started trading at the end of September on the main board after the ADR listing was closed. On the operations side of life, things went well for AngloGold with strong performances pretty much across the board bar one – the Obuasi mine in Ghana. That is worrying because Obuasi has caused huge problems for AngloGold in the past. It was closed for five years and reopened in 2019 after extensive re-engineering, but production was suspended temporarily again in May 2021 after further underground problems. The latest hitch was a production drop in the third quarter last year because of “poor ground conditions in high-grade zones”. The mining method in those zones is now going to be changed. Calderon rates Obuasi highly. Let’s hope he does not end up eating his words on Obuasi like former AngloGold CEO Bobby Godsell once did.

LIFE OF ALBERTO

He is extremely qualified both academically and in terms of work experience. He holds a PhD and MPhil and has worked in leadership roles across the mining, petroleum and energy sectors. He was CEO of Orica, the largest mining explosives company in the world, and an executive with BHP during which time he held the positions of chief executive – aluminium, nickel and corporate development, as well as group executive and chief commercial officer. He has also been CEO of the huge Cerrejón coal company in Colombia. Just to round it off, Calderon has also held senior leadership positions in the International Monetary Fund and the Colombian government.

TIM CARSTENS

CEO

Base Resources

www.baseresources.com.au

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

‘We have strategic relevance because of the scale of Toliara in the whole battery minerals suite’

BASE Resources will lose its “cash driver” this year with the planned closure of its sole operating asset, Kwale, a mineral sands mine in Kenya. While Carstens presides over the safe closure of the mine, he will have more than half an eye on events in Madagascar, where the firm has long sought to develop its Toliara project. As it was originally scoped as a mineral sands mine, the presence of the rare earth monazite in Toliara means it can now be marketed to future financiers as a mineral sands operation with a “battery minerals” sweetener. First, though, Madagascar must bed down a new government following elections in November. Toliara has been beset by regulatory delays. Ideally it should have provided Base with uninterrupted cash flow instead of the hiatus now created by Kwale’s closure. Unfortunately for Carstens, negotiations with the Malagasy government over new fiscal terms have dragged on for far too long. What should have taken months to conclude morphed into years, and subsequently back-ended into talks over a new minerals code. That brings us to the recent elections, which have taken months to conclude. It’s meant frustration on a grand scale for Base. But hope springs eternal, as the cliché goes. Thus, Carstens is crossing fingers for a final investment decision on Toliara in May 2025, and first production and shipments taking place between June and August 2027. Base has also adopted a ‘Vision 2031’ strategy that aims to develop a pipeline of projects that can be developed concurrently, and in different minerals. In this way, Carstens is hoping the firm never again lands shareholders in a cashless limbo.

LIFE OF TIM

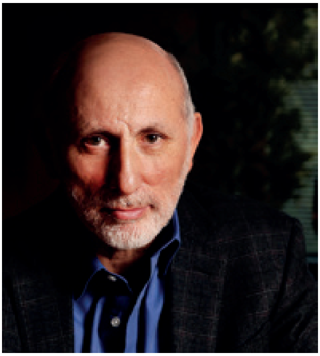
A chartered accountant by trade, Carstens has been the MD of Base Resources since formation in 2008. Previously, he circulated through a number of executive positions at Australian and offshore junior and midcap mining companies such as Perilya, North Limited and Robe River Iron Associates.

MICHAEL CARVILL

CEO

Kenmare Resources

www.kenmareresources.com



RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'The lightning strike was highly unusual, which hasn't previously occurred in Kenmare's 15 years of operation'

KENMARE bought back $30m of its shares last year. The transaction, valued at £4.22 per share, was characterised as "a last chance" for returns of this ilk prior to reprioritising cash for Nataka, a $341m project to be spread over three years. Once completed, Nataka will enable Kenmare to sustain one million tons a year of ilmenite production at its northern Mozambique mine, Moma. Periodically, the firm relocates one of two enormous mobile concentrators over new pools of resource that it then dredges. Nataka's time has come. According to Carvill, it will give Kenmare better production forecasting ability once complete. A definitive feasibility study is due before end-June. Titanium minerals – ilmenite and zircon – are used in ceramics and paint pigments and rely heavily on the health of China's economy. For the first half of 2023, demand was relatively good. Unfortunately, production from Moma was knocked by a lightning strike that Carvill described as the worst in over 15 years of operations, damaging electronic devices and power lines. Then, for the second half of the year, Kenmare enjoyed decent production but sold minerals into a weaker market, thus proving that in mining you can't have it all. Carvill expects a softening in ilmenite pricing for 2024 but it's difficult to call China's economic fortunes. Its emergence from an extended Covid lockdown regime was slower than anticipated last year amid a sluggish property demand. Shares in Kenmare have also been pedestrian. Carvill commented he would like to see an appropriate upward adjustment in Kenmare's share price in recognition of the Nataka capital programme. It will be interesting to see what he makes of the firm's share price in 2024.

LIFE OF MICHAEL

Michael Carvill has had a few scrapes since graduating with a BSc in mechanical engineering from Queen's University, Belfast. He was evicted from Sudan during the Islamic Revolution and trawled around the Philippines post the Ferdinand Marcos regime looking for gold. Then came Mozambique, which may have posed his career's sternest challenge, with Kenmare almost going into liquidation in 2016. Having survived that test, Carvill is keeping it predictable at Kenmare. Relaxation involves sailing in his preferred retreat – Mullaghmore in County Sligo.

IAN COCKERILL

CEO

Endeavour Mining

www.endeavourmining.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

‘You can’t do something in the back-end of nowhere and expect to get away with it. If you are a global company, it will affect you globally’

IAN Cockerill occupies one toasty hot seat at the moment as the ‘full-time’ CEO of Endeavour Mining following the shock dismissal of Sébastien de Montessus in January. What exactly happened to Endeavour’s highly ranked ESG controls that the board – on which Cockerill served as deputy chairperson – was left completely blindsided by De Montessus’s failure to declare a $5.9m costs order? The order related to security services for an asset under sale, thought to be the Agbaou mine in Côte d’Ivoire. Mysteriously, De Montessus hasn’t named the security provider, which raises concerns it could be a less than agreeable player in West Africa’s political jambalaya. It certainly puts Cockerill in tension with shareholders. They will want to know if this is the end of the affair; he may be unable to give that assurance. Meanwhile there’s speculation that Endeavour is now the next target of gold sector consolidation. A buyer is not obvious, but De Montessus’s alleged indiscretion means Endeavour is trading at an even larger discount than usual. This is, of course, a great pity given its rapid climb up the gold ranks under De Montessus, who may choose to defend himself, potentially inflaming the negative newsflow. As for Cockerill, Endeavour could be seen as a ‘redemption shot’. His last major executive role was as CEO of Anglo Coal in 2008, which lasted only 18 months owing to a falling out with then CEO of Anglo American Cynthia Carroll. The much-admired former CEO of Gold Fields, Cockerill will at least have the backing of another former CEO of a JSE gold producer, none other than Srinivasan Venkatakrishnan, who ran AngloGold Ashanti and is now Endeavour’s chairperson.

LIFE OF IAN

Cockerill attended the UK’s Royal School of Mines from which he graduated to the school of hard knocks in South Africa’s rugged gold mining sector. Mine manager for the likes of AngloGold’s Elandsrand and Western Deep Levels, Cockerill eventually landed up as CEO of Gold Fields, where he rebuffed Harmony Gold’s spectacular takeover attempt. After Anglo Coal he took up a string of non-executive roles including one at BHP and Russia-focused Polymetal Group before resigning in 2022 amid the invasion of Ukraine.

LEON COETZER

CEO

Jubilee Metals

www.jubileemetalsgroup.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'The transaction with IRH marks a significant milestone on our journey in Zambia, catapulting our copper expansion in the region'

GLOBAL commodity markets faced headwinds galore in 2023, but Jubilee Metals under Coetzer still seems to have some wind in its sails. In October, the diversified metals and processing company teamed up with Mopani Copper Mines in Zambia to produce copper and cobalt from mine waste. Jubilee also signed a technology exclusive partnership agreement for the development of a copper recovery solution called Glycine Leaching Technology to process historical copper tailings in Zambia with Draslovka Mining Solutions. The project could be extended into neighbouring DRC. Jubilee said in its first quarter operational report that "calculated copper extraction of more than 80% of copper in tails has been achieved from the continuous Glycine Leaching Technology trials". Key to Jubilee's strategy is technical innovation aimed at unlocking value from assets that others have written off as waste. And tailings offer rich pickings. Coetzer is attempting to position Jubilee as a "green" company that is tapping the critical metals required to decarbonise the global economy in a way that addresses the physical legacies of historical mining operations. In an age when ESGs – environmental, social and governance concerns – have risen to the top of the corporate agenda, painting your company with a green sheen is an obvious way to attract and retain investors. In South Africa, the company aims to expand its chrome operational footprint by an additional 450,000 tons a year. Jubilee is targeting two million tons of concentrates annually in the future. In December, Coetzer signed a deal with Abu Dhabi's International Resources Holding – which seems to have won the race to buy Mopani Copper from the Zambian government. Jubilee and IRH will spend \$50m with the aim of extracting 20,000 tons a year of copper from waste rock resources in Zambia.

LIFE OF LEON

Coetzer has been running Jubilee since 2010, when he was promoted from MD of smelting and refining to replace his mentor Colin Bird. Coetzer is a metallurgist by training, with a degree in chemical engineering from Stellenbosch University. This background explains his relentless focus on technology and innovation. Before joining Jubilee he worked for Anglo American for 20 years, of which 16 were spent with Amplats.

WE SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

We are a responsible coal producer and understand the impact that fossil fuels have on the environment.

We believe coal producers have a responsibility to contribute to a just and manageable transition to a lower-carbon economy while balancing the electricity needs of a developing economy.

The inclusion of renewable energy in our portfolio of high-quality coals assets:

- Offers long-term financial stability and diversification
- Provides a solution to our own electricity requirements
- Helps secure South Africa's energy needs

With the acquisition of Seriti Green, the Seriti group is on a pathway to becoming a diverse energy company.

We have started construction at our operation in Mpumalanga where we are employing people while creating a circular economy in the province.

Once we're operating this facility and producing green electrons, we will effectively be embodying the Just Energy Transition (JET).

CRAIG COLTMAN

CEO

Bushveld Minerals

www.bushveldminerals.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

"The difficult part is that you've got to have the confidence in your expenditure, whether it's stay in business or expansion. I'm very serious about that'

CRAIG Coltman stepped into Bushveld Minerals just as the vanadium miner's shares hit rock bottom. His back-to-basics strategy is aimed at refocusing on production for the steel sector while improving plant performance. He has his work cut out. Bushveld's founding CEO, Fortune Mojapelo, was forced out in June 2023 after a litany of missed production promises and a strategy to invest in battery technology partners in the hope this would stimulate new demand. While unquestionably visionary, the strategy was undermined by a deterioration in the firm's core business. It made no sense to allocate capital to future demand when cash wasn't being generated from existing demand. By the time of his departure – in a fiery shareholder meeting – Bushveld was nearly broke. With Coltman, who is divesting from the battery technology strategy, comes a bold recapitalisation programme from angel investor, the relatively unknown Southern Point Resources. It will invest up to $77.5m, which will give it a 50% stake in Bushveld's Mpumalanga province Vanchem processing plant which blends vanadium ore from the firm's Vametco mine in Limpopo with third-party ore. Southern Point has also taken responsibility for Bushveld's marketing, injected working capital into the business, and bought shares in the listed entity. The recapitalisation received a critical boost when in late November, Bushveld's seed investor, the UK-based Orion Capital, agreed to refinance $46.9m in debt. "I have a plan," says Coltman in blunt, practical terms. It will have to be an effective one. Investors have struggled to bring these vanadium assets to account ever since they were abandoned by Anglo American's Highveld Steel in the 1990s.

LIFE OF CRAIG

Coltman, a chartered accountant, has served more than 30 years at De Beers, where he's held various positions including CFO of De Beers Consolidated Mines. He continues to chair the De Beers Pension Fund. He is also treasurer of the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative, an organisation founded in 2002 to care for children in East and Southern Africa. A graduate of the University of Cape Town, Coltman lists adventure biking as a pastime.

AL
COOK

CEO

De Beers

www.debeersgroup.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'Lab-grown diamonds do what crystal and zirconiums have done: they are a fantastically fun bit of fashion jewellery'

THE global economy's love affair with fossil fuels may now be cooling faster than the planet is warming. This makes Al Cook's decision in 2022 to leave the oil industry for diamonds look like a prescient leap from sinking ship to lifeboat. Until, that is, the lifeboat sprung a leak. De Beers' rough diamond revenue cratered in 2023, culminating in ninth tender sales of only $80m compared to $454m a year earlier. Pointedly, this took sales below pandemic levels and was the lowest number reported since the company began publishing the results of its sight sales in 2016. India's moratorium on imports and China's flagging recovery are among the reasons cited for the poor performance. Cook has some choppy waters to navigate but there is optimism the diamond sector will revive this year. Aside from macroeconomic challenges, De Beers is waiting on sign-off of a new sales agreement with Botswana. The in-principle deal signed last year was described by Cook as a triumph. Then there is the threat posed to De Beers of lab-grown diamonds. Cook told investors in December the near-90% discount at which these diamonds trade effectively consigns them to "fun" jewellery items. This makes the more serious moments in life, such as weddings, the preserve of natural diamonds. On the production front, De Beers began underground mining at its Venetia mine in South Africa and in January approved the $1bn underground expansion of the Jwaneng mine in Botswana. Meanwhile, there's been some talk – as is customary in the down-cycle – that De Beers doesn't belong in the Anglo American portfolio. Normal scuttlebutt for sure, but Anglo badly needs its 85%-owned subsidiary to regain its sparkle.

LIFE OF AL

A geologist, Cook holds an MA in Natural Sciences from Cambridge and has completed the international executive programme at INSEAD. He is a fellow of the Geological Society of London as well as a fellow of the Energy Institute. He spent 20 years with BP running operations before moving up the management ranks to become chief of staff to the CEO. He then spent nearly seven years with Equinor before he landed at De Beers. His geological expertise makes him a good cut for De Beers, especially as it's been decades since a major new source of diamonds has been discovered.

HEYE
DAUN

CEO

Osino Resources

www.osinoresources.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'The view has always been Namibia is not prospective for gold. We're proving that perception wrong'

THERE'S a bit of excitement around Heye Daun's Osino Resources following the discovery of a new prospect appropriately called Eureka. Its development, which is by no means assured, could nonetheless herald the start of a new gold district in Namibia. That's the view of Canadian bank BMO Capital Markets, which says Eureka's development could boost Osino's share price this year. As a patriotic Namibian, Daun is not exactly playing all this down but he does acknowledge there's some road to travel on Eureka. He calculates that if its resource can be built to two million ounces in tandem with Ondundu, a nearby, previously worked deposit bought from Canada's B2Gold last year, a standalone mining complex could be established. It's early days, especially as Osino's priority is an investment decision on its flagship Twin Hills project. The results of a definitive feasibility study on Twin Hills in June were not as rosy as its prefeasibility study, but at an all-in sustaining cost of $1,100 per ounce it remains exciting, especially in the current gold market. Capital of $365m will be required for the 13-year, 152,000oz/year project, but if clinched early next year, Osino will be on track for first production by the end of 2025 or early 2026. In other developments, Osino debuted on the Namibian Stock Exchange and completed its first bookbuild. Although a modest C$2.8m, it takes Osino some way to the 5% Namibian ownership it needs to fulfill permit requirements. An agreement to farm out Osino's Omaruru lithium property with Prospect Resources passed the first phase. Once two more phases of drilling are completed, Prospect will own 85% of Omaruru and 'free carry' Osino to a definitive feasibility study.

LIFE OF HEYE

Born and bred in Namibia, Daun has been involved in the mining sector for more than 25 years. After starting out building and operating mines with Rio Tinto, AngloGold Ashanti and Gold Fields, he moved on to roles at the sharp end of corporate finance with Nedbank and Old Mutual. Entrepreneurship is his métier, however. He cofounded Auryx Gold Corp, which was sold to B2Gold. As a former president and CEO of Ecuador Gold & Copper (EGX) he was instrumental in its C$200m merger with Odin Mining to form Lumina Gold Corp. He founded Osino in 2015.

TRACEY DAVIES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Just Share

www.justshare.org.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'There's a white knight mentality in corporate South Africa: Government is dysfunctional, and business will save the day, so why are you challenging us when you should be challenging government?'

IN June 2023, Just Share celebrated its fifth birthday – a period its founder Tracey Davies described as a rollercoaster ride. Since the shareholder activist NGO arrived on the scene, it has attended over 60 annual general meetings, where directors and executives often have had to field uncomfortable questions about their (lack of) progress on climate ambitions. "We try and celebrate the little wins," Davies said in a radio interview, admitting that issues like climate change and inequality were moving targets. Just Share's objectives are to point out the discrepancies in corporate accountability or, as she says: "What business says it's doing and what's really happening with ESG [environmental, social and governance issues]." In 2023, Just Share published its first Vertical Pay Gaps report, in which the salaries of employees at four big corporates were assessed. The NGO is lobbying for legislation that will compel the private sector to make information on wages public. In 2023, Just Share kept a close eye on the shortcomings of the climate policies of big polluters, notably Sasol and coal miners. Davies is unflinching in her assessments: of Exxaro Resources, she said the miner did not present a "compelling case for any science-based net-zero strategy". She also accused the company of not taking climate change seriously. As a regular columnist of *Financial Mail*, Davies has underscored the doublespeak in the Cabinet, where ministers often contradict one another on South Africa's net-zero and Just Transition ambitions.

LIFE OF TRACEY

Davies has a BA LLB from the University of Cape Town, an LLM from the New York University School of Law and a qualification in sustainable finance from Oxford University's Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment. She is admitted as an attorney in South Africa and a solicitor in Britain and Wales. She serves on the advisory board for the National Business Initiative's Just Transition Pathways Initiative, and the Global Reporting Initiative's Human Rights Technical Committee. Prior to founding Just Share, she was a senior attorney and programme head for corporate accountability and transparency at the Centre for Environmental Rights.

MICK
DAVIS

CEO

Vision Blue Resources

www.vision-blue.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'If transport or energy are not available, you have to build your own, which adds to the collateral capital and reduces your returns'

MICK Davis's Vision Blue Resources (VBR) raised $650m in April last year, outstripping the firm's initial $500m target in an effort to further build out its portfolio of assets currently consisting of graphite, vanadium, silicon metal, tin, and rare earths. These minerals, the 'bits and bobs' of the energy transition in that they are niche but critical, have seen VBR plough money into in geographies as diverse as Canada and Cornwall. Most recently, Davis inked a $40m deal for lime in Papua New Guinea. But South Africa is absent from VBR's investment hit list. Speaking at an investment conference in Johannesburg, Davis didn't mince his words, saying the country of his birth didn't cut the mustard – to overextend the metaphor. South Africa's difficulty attracting meaningful offshore investment has been discussed endlessly, especially in these pages. Suffice to say, Davis's concerns focus on failing infrastructure (see quote above), uncertain security of tenure, and the shifting sands of government regulation. The only African country to attract VBR investment is Madagascar through NextSource which in October exported its first superflake grade of graphite from the island's Molo mine. In December, a feasibility study set down plans for a $162m expansion that will see Molo produce a steady-state 150,000 tons of graphite a year. Davis, once the leader of Xstrata and still an industry titan, takes his place in Miningmx's *Rainmakers & Potstirrers* this year as South Africa's golden opportunity gone a-begging.

LIFE OF MICK

One of South Africa's finest exports, Sir Mick was Eskom's financial director before joining Billiton and then on to Xstrata. After narrowly failing to take over Anglo American, he then fell out with shareholder Glencore, which resulted in him falling prey to a hostile takeover. Davis returned with the X2 Resources fund. Troubled by a restrictive shareholder mandate and the disruptive Covid pandemic, the fund was closed with no investments to its name. No worries, Mick returned with Vision Blue. Once the chairperson of the UK's Conservative Party, he was knighted for services to Holocaust awareness.

RICHARD DUFFY

CEO

Petra Diamonds

www.petradiamonds.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'We believe actions taken by major producers to curb supply will assist in bringing stability and support to the market'

RICHARD Duffy has to be a worried man. The reason is that it's all going to hell on his watch, again. The diamond market is turning down and Petra is back in the smelly stuff, caught between declining revenues and commitments to hefty capital expenditure programmes. The good news is that Duffy has learnt from his previous bitter experiences and is doing something about the situation immediately instead of merely hoping for the best as he did before. He took over Petra in 2019 when the company was up to its eyeballs in debt, but Duffy had hoped an improving diamond market would see the company through its looming financial crunch. Covid-19 clobbered that one, resulting eventually in Petra holding a major restructuring of its loans through which its creditors ended up with 91% of the stock. Duffy then turned bullish on the diamond market again declaring in February 2022 that a major structural change was taking place where the "long-predicted supply squeeze is being reflected over all the diamond categories". If only. The market has turned down sharply – yet again – and Duffy has reacted by deferring $65m in capital extension programmes, meaning that Petra's production is going to drop by an as-yet unspecified amount over the next three years instead of ramping up by around 1.3 million carats. If there's an underlying thread in all this, it is the relentless optimism of the diamond producers about favourable "long-term prospects" for the diamond market. De Beers has been singing from this hymn sheet since the days of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer. Time and time again this optimism has been shown to be misplaced. De Beers has Anglo to back it, but Petra is on its own.

LIFE OF RICHARD

He has a mining engineering degree from the University of Nottingham and an MBA from the London Business School. Prior to taking over Petra he spent most of his career with Anglo American and then AngloGold Ashanti where he became chief financial officer. His time as CEO at Petra has been a baptism by fire, where just about everything that could go wrong with the company – tailings dam collapses, financial implosions, full-scale confrontations with the Tanzanian government – has gone wrong. It's a measure of his resilience that he has coped so far.

PAUL DUNNE

CEO

Northam Platinum

www.northam.co.za

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We can't be blind to the market. It is telling us that the immediately available metal is clearly excess to requirements'

PAUL Dunne lost the battle for control of Royal Bafokeng Platinum (RBPlat) with rival Impala Platinum (Implats), but may yet win the longer-term race for profits and production. Under Dunne's guidance, Northam is growing production at its mechanised Booysendal mine on the eastern limb of the platinum belt and analysts say it is better positioned than its peers to weather the slump in platinum group metals (PGM) prices. Booysendal is the jewel in Northam's crown, a mechanised and shallow asset that can keep boosting production while remaining profitable at relatively low prices. Community unrest around Booysendal – often linked to procurement mafias seeking a slice of contracts from the mining sector – has declined significantly, thanks to a collaborative effort between Northam and its regional peers as well as the South African Police Service. This may serve as a template for wider initiatives between business and government to tackle the scourge of crime. An affable executive with a deep understanding of the sector, Dunne has signalled he won't be pursuing M&A anytime soon after the failure to secure RBPlat. Throwing in the towel in July of 2023 with the sale of its 34.5% stake in RBPlat to Implats for R13.1bn shored up Northam's balance sheet at a critical time for PGM producers. Maintaining and building on that balance sheet at a time when the market is not screaming for PGMs is Dunne's current focus. But he has a long view and maintains that the internal combustion engine, which requires PGMs in its autocatalysts, is likely to be around far longer than many in the market anticipate.

LIFE OF PAUL

Hailing from the UK, Dunne is a keen chess player, a passion that probably informs his strategic approach and eye on the long term. He also dabbles in other pursuits such as fly fishing. Work hard and play hard seems to be his motto: with a glint in his eye, he enjoys a pint and good conversation. A former senior Implats executive, he is also vice president at the Minerals Council SA. He has a BSc Honours in electrical engineering and an MBA.

CLIFFORD ELPHICK

CEO

Gem Diamonds

www.gemdiamonds.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'It's difficult for us to see why the business is not appreciated more'

CLIFFORD Elphick stands as a classic example of hubris leading to nemesis. Actually, let's make that near nemesis, because he's still in the diamond business. Elphick was one of the "princes" at De Beers who left to found his own diamond operation in 2004. He departed after De Beers embarked on a series of radical structural changes to its business and his plan was to set up Gem Diamonds as an example of how a diamond group should be run. It did not work out that way. He listed Gem on the London Stock Exchange in 2007, raising $635m which he proceeded to blow on the acquisition of various diamond mines around the world. All of them have been closed down or sold and Elphick is left with his original Letšeng Diamond Mine in Lesotho and the flooded Ghaghoo Diamond Mine in Botswana. Gem has been trying unsuccessfully to sell Ghaghoo for years at a knock-down price of around $3m after spending $85m in developing it. The Gem share price started trading around £11 but collapsed to £1.25 in 2009 and has stayed below £1 since 2019. Elphick is in denial about that miserable performance, declaring in March 2022 that Gem was "grossly undervalued" and the share price was "unacceptable to be quite frank". He added he was "at a loss" to explain the company's valuation given the improvement in the diamond market. Clearly he has turned a "Nelsonian eye" to Gem's performance under his management since it listed. The current downturn in the diamond market does not bode well for Letšeng, which turned loss-making in the six months to August.

LIFE OF CLIFFORD

He was originally one of the "anointed few" at Anglo American Corporation which he joined in 1986 after obtaining a BCom at the University of Cape Town followed by a BCompt Hons at the University of South Africa. He was seconded to E Oppenheimer & Son as Harry Oppenheimer's personal assistant in 1988 and was appointed MD of E Oppenheimer & Son in 1990 – a position he held until he left in 2004. He served as an executive director of De Beers after its privatisation in 2000. Elphick is currently the non-executive chairman of LSE-listed Zanaga Iron Ore and is well known in South Africa as the owner of the Kurland Polo Estate in Plettenberg Bay.

JOHAN FERREIRA

CEO

Khoemacau Copper Mining

www.khoemacau.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We are excited by Khoemacau's future with MMG, who share our vision for the expansion'

WITH Johan Ferreira at the helm, Khoemacau has advanced its flagship $1bn copper project in Botswana into a sustainable, long-term operation. Against the backdrop of a global scramble for critical minerals, this was sure to draw outside attention. In late November 2023, the company announced that it would be acquired by Australia-based MMG Limited, a unit of China Minmetals Corporation, China's largest metals and minerals group. The deal, which is expected to be finalised in the first half of 2024, will give China another foothold in the African minerals space, this one in the emerging copper province of Botswana. The current management team at Khoemacau, including Ferreira, will remain in place, providing continuity as the operation moves into its next phase. With a pre-feasibility study on the Khoemacau expansion and a solar power project now complete, attention is shifting to a feasibility study aimed at lifting production capacity from 3.65 million tons a year to 8.15Mt/y. This should lead to an increase in payable copper from about 60,000 tons a year to 130,000t/y. In the announcement of the acquisition, Ferreira thanked the current owners "who as custodians of Khoemacau over many years successfully transformed the company from a development idea to a fully-fledged operating copper mine". Khoemacau now has a deeper source of capital to tap as it embarks on its expansion. This also fits with Botswana's drive to diversify its economy from its dependence on diamonds, which for decades underpinned its prosperity.

LIFE OF JOHAN

Ferreira holds a Bachelor of Engineering (Mining) degree from the University of Pretoria. He started his mining career in 1986 with Anglo American as a learner official and progressed to the level of senior vice president operations – South Africa region. He also spent four years running Newmont's operations in Ghana. For relaxation, he likes to hit the road on his Harley-Davidson.

RICHARD FLOYD

CEO

Blyvoor Gold

www.blyvoorgold.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'After years of standing idle, Blyvoor is now a profitable mine with healthy growth and a positive outlook'

RICHARD Floyd teamed up with the late mining entrepreneur Peter Skeat in 2015 to bring historic West Rand gold mine Blyvooruitzicht out of liquidation. Prior to that the mine had been left to rot after a deal to transfer the property fell through. Skeat was a master at spotting value, especially in unloved assets. Prior to his death in April last year the mine – held in a new entity called Blyvoor Gold – was targeting 100,000 ounces a year in gold production. No mean ambition for a company that reopened in the teeth of the Covid pandemic, producing 30,000 oz. Floyd says the plan is to get to 200,000 oz/year and double the mine's 1,800 staff complement in the process. Before that he needs to marshal more funds from offshore backers. Since 2015, R2bn has been ploughed into the mine, some of which was from Orion Resource Partners, a New York-headquartered bank through which Blyvoor Gold was able to land R900m in return for a 20% stake in the mine. Happily, the rand gold price has played ball, increasing more than 100% in the past five years and improving Blyvoor's prospects. Against this background, a listing is a possibility, says Floyd. But it's not been plain sailing. In November, employees staged a brief underground sit-in on the basis they wanted to overturn the closed-shop agreement with Blyvoor Workers' Union, with some other benefits thrown in such as work incentives and a 13th cheque. The protest ended after it was declared illegal by the Labour Court. But the incident goes to show producing gold in a relatively abandoned region of Johannesburg is filled with risk.

LIFE OF RICHARD

Floyd graduated from the University of Cape Town with law and business science degrees. After working as an attorney in mining, he joined father-in-law Peter Skeat in Galaxy Gold, which traded briefly on the JSE. Floyd took full control of Blyvoor Gold following the passing last year of Skeat, with whom he had co-founded the firm. Floyd is a full-on action man: a triathlete with interests in flying (including helicopters), he also finds time for diving (underwater, not flying) and sailing. He is deputy chair of the Brakpan Aero Club and owns several endurance horses (as pets, apparently).

MIKE FRASER

CEO

Gold Fields

www.goldfields.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'I took a meander through junior gold mining, which brought rich experience'

GOLD Fields management has been in upheaval ever since the departure of Nick Holland in 2020, so shareholders are hoping that Mike Fraser will bring stability. Since 2020, almost the entire executive committee has changed including CFO Paul Schmidt who is to leave this year. Interim CEO Martin Preece, credited with transforming the South African problem asset South Deep into a profitable mine, did a fine job but the board seems to have preferred Fraser's international experience. Gold Fields needs to expand globally to maintain long-term production, but the failed bid for Yamana Gold, which ended with former CEO Chris Griffith's departure, shows the board has little appetite for risk. Preece has already taken Gold Fields into two JV agreements which have been cautiously welcomed by the market: one with AngloGold in Ghana (yet to be approved by the Ghanaians) and another with Osisko Mining in Canada. Fraser must also focus on bringing the $1bn Salares Norte mine in Chile into full production, with no further cost overruns or production delays. The group is currently tightening the screws on the project after saying in December it would not produce gold until April, resulting in half the production in 2024 it first promised. Fraser has said he intends to take Gold Fields "to the next level", with a focus on growing cash flows. He will be revisiting capital allocations, optimising existing assets, and, after that, looking for growth prospects. Fraser's background in human resources and organisational transformation at BHP and South32 may help to stop executive leakage and should also help in dealing with findings of an embarrassing independent survey showing that bullying, harassment and sexism is widespread in Gold Fields.

LIFE OF MIKE

Mike Fraser was previously at BHP for about six years where he headed human resources before leaving for South32. He managed South32's thermal coal mines through their transition to current owner Seriti Resources and played a key role in negotiations with Eskom to secure a new power agreement for the Hillside Aluminium smelter. When he left South32, for AIM-listed gold miner Chaarat Gold, he was the group's vice-president and COO for global metals. He holds a BCom and an MBA.

ROBERT FRIEDLAND

CO-CHAIRPERSON

Ivanhoe Mines

www.ivanhoemines.com

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'Seventy is the new 20'

LONG a staunch supporter of mining in Africa, Robert Friedland last year doubled down on his predictions for the future of mining on the continent; on the size of the new copper resources his group is finding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); and even on platinum group metals (PGMs) in South Africa. He also did something no other international mining entrepreneur has been prepared to do in recent years which was put his head on the block voicing major support for the future of South Africa. That was at the inaugural London Indaba held in June by Resources 4 Africa. Friedland told delegates there was "little to fear" in South Africa, adding "we are very bullish on the South African mining history". Let's hope he is right – although those comments were obviously aimed in part at buttering up the ruling ANC elite. South African mines minister Gwede Mantashe must have fallen off his chair after the years of abuse he has been getting from South African mining executives. But it was Friedland's comments on a new PGM discovery that really raised eyebrows in South Africa's mining sector, which has yet to accept that his Platreef Project will be a success, even though it is due to start commercial production in the third quarter of 2024. Friedland said his group had found a huge "gravity anomaly" four miles long and three miles wide it was calling the Mokopane Feeder. "We think it is the source of the Bushveld Complex," he commented. Some South African geologists simply do not buy this and reckon it is part of Friedland's well-known "showmanship" style. But Friedland has delivered time and again on his claims over the past 20 years. Again, let's hope he's right!

LIFE OF ROBERT

He's the world's most famous and controversial mining entrepreneur who is showing no signs of slowing down as he gets into his 70s, although there are signs he could be mellowing a bit. Friedland hates the media and formerly never spoke to the press, but over the past year he has given interviews. The major developments by his group over the decades include Voisey's Bay in Canada, Oyu Tolgoi in Mongolia, Kamoa-Kakula in the DRC, and the Platreef Project in South Africa. He holds a BA in political science from Reed College in Oregon, United States, after which he went to study Sanskrit and Buddhism in India.

NEAL FRONEMAN

CEO

Sibanye-Stillwater

www.sibanyestillwater.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'We can look forward to seeing an improvement in PGM prices, but I don't think we are going back to where we were a few years ago'

SIBANYE-Stillwater had a typically eventful year under Froneman's all-action, outspoken leadership. Some unusual obstacles have also 'sprouted' on its diversification path into green metals: its Rhyolite Ridge lithium project in Nevada hit a snag because of its proximity to buckwheat, a rare plant native to the area. Reconfiguring the pit so that operations don't threaten the plant has delayed the project by a year. Sibanye-Stillwater also faced shareholder wrath when it launched a \$500m convertible bond offering in November 2023 to finance expansion at a time when earnings were shrinking. As a convertible instrument, jitters about dilution saw the company's share price tank over 20% on the day of the announcement. Expect earnings, the dividend, and the health of Sibanye-Stillwater's balance sheet to be enduring themes this year, as well as threat of production and project cuts. As if life couldn't be busier, Froneman embarked on some extramural activities. He helps lead a crime-combating initiative which is part of a collaboration between business and government that aims to tackle a trifecta of woes afflicting South Africa's economy: crime, logistics and energy. Sibanye-Stillwater's own operations are in the line of fire after it reported a surge in attacks on its security personnel in 2023. Froneman was also appointed the new chairperson of the World Gold Council. Such roles speak to his energy and sense of duty. When he sees a problem in the mining sector, he steps up to the plate, and is never shy of speaking out. He warned in October of looming layoffs in the platinum group metals (PGM) sector because of falling prices. Sibanye-Stillwater subsequently opened restructuring talks at its Kroondal, Marikana and Rustenburg PGM operations, having previously done the same at its ageing gold mine, Kloof.

LIFE OF NEAL

Froneman has spent almost four decades in the mining sector, and the last decade has been the most eventful. The CEO of Sibanye-Stillwater since its spin-off from Gold Fields, Froneman has expanded the company from gold into PGMs and now battery metals. He still finds time for his passions, which include target shooting on his game farm, music, and tinkering with the engines of cars to make them go faster.

RUSSELL FRYER

CEO

Critical Metals

www.criticalmetals.co.uk

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'The idea is to produce 1,000 tons of copper cathode and 500 tons of cobalt hydroxide, which would put us on the radar'

ANOTHER big year awaits Russell Fryer's Critical Metals, which operates the 12,000-ton-a-year Molulu copper and cobalt mine in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The company signed its first sales agreement in October last year and secured a hydrometallurgical plant about 100km from Molulu, itself 98km from Lubumbashi in the DRC's Katanga province. These are promising signs for Fryer, who believes Critical Minerals has capacity to produce 400 tons of copper cathode and 200 tons of cobalt hydroxide, worth about $20m in Ebitda. But investors seem sceptical. Shares in Critical Minerals fell 60% last year, suggesting the market wants to see a track record first. ('It didn't help that the company was suspended from the London Stock Exchange for a week in November owing to a late submission of financial reports'.) Nonetheless, Fryer has retained the support of shareholders, who subscribed for £2m in shares, while a further $3m in a bank loan was finalised. The key for Fryer going forward, however, is operational consistency at Molulu without which there's no platform for his ambitions. Fryer wants to operate mines in five jurisdictions and hopes to add tungsten/tantalum to the company's mix. He is also on the lookout for more copper output. In this regard new investors are being feted. Fryer has also set up Critical Metals USA in Connecticut aimed at attracting US government funding given the country's keen interest in establishing minerals security. Plans are also afoot to make Critical Metals shares available over the counter in the US in order to give North Americans an alternative to London trade. First, though, some quarter-in quarter-out operational consistency is required.

LIFE OF RUSSELL

Fryer, a former banker with institutions Deutsche and HSBC, is well travelled both in geography and in the industry itself. He has at various points over 28 years been an investment adviser, mining entrepreneur and columnist. Critical Metals sees him return to resource development. He is qualified in tax as well as investment markets, and rule and theory, the latter obtained from South Africa's University of the Witwatersrand.

SEAN GILBERTSON

CEO

Gemfields

www.gemfieldsgroup.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We would very much like to add a proper sapphire deposit, but those don't crop up every day'

COLOURED gemstones have avoided the price slump in the diamond market that compelled De Beers to cut supply. In happy contrast, emerald and ruby prices have grown at a compound rate of 13% and 17% respectively in three years. This should give Gemfields reason to smile, and perhaps a modicum of comfort, even after accepting that the quality and quantity of coloured gems can be variable. For evidence of this market volatility, look no further than Gemfields' emeralds auction in November which had to be postponed owing to sub-optimal quality and lower-than-expected volumes. Gilbertson says he's not worried about these ups and downs as there are plenty of other risks to worry about. Illegal mining remains a problem in Mozambique where Gemfields operates its Montepuez ruby mine. Added to this is the nearby insurgency that flares up from time to time. In 2022, Gemfields evacuated the mine and then in the following year suspended exploration at its Nairoto site. For all this, Gilbertson is undeterred. He can lean on the fact that his company survived the Covid pandemic which almost bankrupted it. For the year ahead, Gemfields will spend $70m building a second processing plant at Montepuez which represents its largest capital outlay to date and will treble the mine's processing capacity. The plant, which should come on stream in the first half of 2025, will be funded from a combination of cash and debt. On the merger and acquisition front, Gilbertson says Gemfields already owns the world's biggest ruby and emerald mines, but would "certainly be there" if a world-class sapphire mine was up for sale

LIFE OF SEAN

As a director of Pallinghurst Resources, which was Gemfields' largest single shareholder for many years, Gilbertson led Gemfields' strategy in coloured gemstones from 2006 to 2017. He was appointed CEO in 2017 when Pallinghurst unbundled its stake. He studied mining engineering at Wits University, and spent time working in South Africa's deep-level gold and platinum mines. He has also been a trader and worked in project finance. Sean is a keen cyclist, loves the bush, and is the legal custodian of seven critically endangered black rhino in Namibia.

ENOCH GODONGWANA

MINISTER OF FINANCE

South Africa

www.treasury.gov.za

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'They call me Mr Austerity. I don't like it, but I can live with it'

ENOCH Godongwana has been holding South Africa's purse strings for just over two years – arguably one of the more undesirable jobs in the world. The country's GDP is in negative territory, debt is a massive R4.3 trillion, and infrastructure is crumbling. Under Godongwana's finance ministry, South Africa was put on a grey list by financial watchdog the Financial Action Task Force for not fully complying with international standards around the prevention of money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing. When he presented the medium-term budget policy framework in November, he warned that public debt was untenable, and that South Africa could run out of money in just four months. Tax revenue also tanked due to a sharp fall in corporate income tax, especially from the mining sector, on the back of weaker commodity prices and lower sales. Godongwana is still viewed favourably by the markets because he is sticking to his fiscal guns despite immense pressure from civil organisations and trade unions to open the spending taps to stimulate growth. But he has also come under fire for not truly representing the status quo in his budget reviews. A case in point is the 2023 main budget in February, when he did not stipulate any wage increases for civil servants. Barely a month later, government reached an agreement with trade unions for a 7.5% pay hike that led to R23.6bn in expenses that were not budgeted for. In this year's medium-term budget framework in November, Godongwana made no provision for any form of bailout for the ailing Transnet, only to agree to a R47bn lifeline in the form of a guarantee facility for its substantial debt a month later.

LIFE OF ENOCH

Godongwana has an MSc in financial economics from the University of London. He kicked off his political career as a shop steward for the Metal and Allied Workers' Union in 1979 and later served as an organiser for the National Union of Metalworkers between 1983 and 1989. Godongwana was a founding member of South Africa's National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac) a grouping of workers, business and government officials who preside over economic policy. As head of the ANC's sub-committee on economic transformation, he was considered instrumental in the push-back against the nationalisation of mines.

GODFREY GOMWE

CEO

MC Mining

www.mcmining.co.za

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'Even if Gomwe remains MC Mining's CEO, he may find it's become even harder to fund coal'

MC Mining's claim to fame is a large coal resource called Makhado, located in South Africa's Limpopo province. Unfortunately, successive management at the firm, previously known as Coal of Africa, has failed to develop it. Based on recent events, Makhado is set to remain fallow for a while longer. A proposed cash takeover offer by MC Mining's largest shareholders, Senosi Group Investment Holdings and Denocept Proprietary, which own 23.4% and 6.9% and are said to represent the wishes of 64.5% of total shareholders, was rejected by an independent committee established by the coal company. It ruled the proposed takeover failed to identify a firm price as it only 'guided' to a 20 and 23 Australian cents per share offer. Quite where the offer stands now is anyone's guess. For starters, Gomwe rarely, if ever, speaks with the media; secondly, MC Mining's share price has sunk back to its pre-offer levels of about 14 Aussie cents. In the meantime, Makhado – estimated to cost $96m at the last reckoning – remains unfunded although Gomwe was able to raise A$40m via a rights issue in July 2023. Even if Gomwe stays MC Mining's CEO, he may find it's become even harder to fund coal. About half of Makhado's 46 million tons of saleable resource is thermal coal, which is unpopular with banks (the rest is metallurgical coal used in steelmaking). Lenders also have to take on board the persistent uncertainty of how a new project will access South Africa's limited rail and power infrastructure. Time is not MC Mining's friend.

LIFE OF GODFREY

Gomwe is a chartered accountant by profession with a BAcc degree from the University of Zimbabwe and an MBL from Unisa. He enjoyed a high-flying corporate career after joining Anglo American in 1999, becoming CEO of Anglo American's global thermal coal business as well as COO of Anglo American South Africa and head of group business development Africa. Other roles he has filled include CEO of Anglo American Zimbabwe, and he sat on various Anglo company boards including Kumba Iron Ore, Anglo American Platinum, Highveld Steel & Vanadium and Mondi South Africa.

PRAVIN GORDHAN

MINISTER PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

South Africa

www.dpe.gov.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'I do not have a spanner or anything else in my office to go around to fix a power station or anything like that'

ONCE hailed as a valiant anti-corruption warrior, Pravin Gordhan has fallen thoroughly out of favour. His department might cease to exist after next year's elections, and opposition parties and even trade unions have called for his head. Reports of political meddling regularly surface – especially at Transnet and Eskom – following the resignations of several executives and board members at the two entities. In September, Transnet CFO Nonkululeko Dlamini and group CEO Portia Derby resigned, followed by the freight rail executive Siza Mzimela. Granted, Transnet deteriorated to the point of total collapse under Derby and Mzimela, but insiders believe their exits were due to interference by Gordhan. The minister has dismissed these claims against him, and said their respective departures were related to Transnet's performance. There have also been claims that the delay in the appointment of a new Eskom CEO should be laid at Gordhan's door. The announcement of Dan Marokane as Eskom CEO – almost a year after André de Ruyter's departure in February – is a case in point. Marokane's name was reportedly put forward for CEO months ago by former Eskom board chair Mpho Makwana. But Gordhan and Makwana crossed swords over a number of governance and management issues, and Gordhan dismissed Marokane's nomination, dragging the recruitment process back to square one. Makwana later resigned and Gordhan replaced him with former MTN CEO Mteto Nyati. By all accounts Gordhan's political career will soon be over. An ANC insider summed it up as follows: "Eskom and Transnet are in shambles, and they are all singing the same song – it can't be a coincidence. It's a good thing we have considered closing down this department after next year's election."

LIFE OF PRAVIN

Gordhan holds a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree from the former University of Durban-Westville. A student activist in the 1960s, he was later politically active in the SACP and ANC structures. He participated in the Codesa talks ahead of the first democratic election in 1994. Gordhan was commissioner for the South African Revenue Service for 10 years – a position he served with distinction. In 2009, then president Jacob Zuma appointed him finance minister. During the height of state capture, Zuma dismissed him, only for current President Cyril Ramaphosa to reappoint him to his cabinet in 2019.

CHRIS GRIFFITH

CEO

Vedanta Base Metals

www.vedantaresources.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'Overall, I have no regrets about Gold Fields. I learnt some things there and I left some things behind and hopefully most of those were positive'

ONE of the great unsolved corporate mysteries is why Chris Griffith quit as CEO of Gold Fields in December 2022 in the wake of the group's failed attempt to take over Yamana Gold. There was no real reason for Griffith to resign. The fact that Gold Fields got outbid by rival Agnico Eagle was proof of the value of the asset the group was after. Gold Fields chair Yunus Suleman has categorically denied any kind of bust-up between Griffith and the Gold Fields board. Griffith himself is saying very little, although interviewed in December he commented: "It wasn't like we got the plot all wrong. Ultimately shareholders were saying look, we're unhappy about that direction. Both the board and I said look, let's find something different then." Make of that what you will but it looks like the deal was stymied by the big institutional shareholders. Griffith has now moved onto a new gig as CEO of the base metals division of Vedanta Resources which is to be split off and listed as a separate company. He will also be president of Vedanta's international business. Griffith is understandably upbeat about his new position, but he may be letting himself in for a different kind of corporate pressure. Vedanta is a family-controlled business and the market scuttlebutt is that executive chairman Anil Agarwal is a difficult person to work for with a management style bordering on dictatorial. Griffith has two South African predecessors at Vedanta. Former AngloGold Ashanti CEO Srinivasan Venkatakrishnan went there as group CEO in 2018 but lasted only two years. Deshnee Naidoo – former CFO of Anglo American Thermal Coal – worked there as CEO of Vedanta's Africa base metals over the same period but also moved on.

LIFE OF CHRIS

He holds a BEng degree Hons from the University of Pretoria and spent most of his career at Anglo American, starting at Anglo American Platinum (Amplats) where he worked his way steadily up through the ranks. He moved into the upper management of the larger Anglo group, becoming CEO of Kumba Iron Ore from 2008 to 2012 and CEO of Amplats from 2012 to 2020. He steered Amplats successfully through a period of restructuring and confrontation with the South African government all the while answering to his ultimate boss – Anglo American Corporation – which is the major shareholder. Griffith took over as CEO of Gold Fields in April 2021.

FRANK HALLAM

CEO

Platinum Group Metals

www.platinumgroupmetals.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'Saudi Arabia offers an attractive climate that includes highly competitive energy costs, lower tax and government financing incentives'

FRANK Hallam's job didn't get easier in 2023. Platinum Group Metals (PTM) is hoping to develop the Waterberg Project, a platinum group metal (PGM) deposit in South Africa's Limpopo province. PGMs had a torrid time, especially palladium – the metal Waterberg Project will produce the most – which collapsed nearly 50% last year. As a result, it's been hard to talk about introducing new palladium to the market but that's exactly what Hallam has been doing. Don't dismiss his chances despite the numerous obstacles on PTM's plate. For one, Waterberg Project is a counter-cyclical argument. Right now, no-one wants new PGM production but some in the market think there's been permanent structural damage to PGM supply. In the short term, PTM is working on an update of a feasibility study of the Waterberg Project. At the last take, it was a 420,000 ounce a year venture costing about \$600m. Its scope will surely be phased, if not reined in completely. Secondly, Hallam has to secure a concentrate offtake agreement, which is critical to financing the project. He told a Johannesburg investment conference he had been "pounding on doors" in search of a deal, but nobody expected him to go to Saudi Arabia to do it. By December, PTM announced a cooperation agreement with Ajlan & Bros Mining & Metals to look into building a PGM smelter and base metals refinery in Saudi Arabia, potentially leading to concentrate offtake terms as well as seeking concentrate supply from other PGM projects globally. This could be a huge coup for Hallam after years of fruitlessly negotiating with Waterberg partner Impala Platinum over a deal. According to Hallam, the cost of transporting the concentrate to Saudi Arabia will be offset by its cheap power, low taxation and significant government incentives.

LIFE OF FRANK

A qualified CA with expertise in business administration, Hallam developed an early taste for risk not normally associated with your common-or-garden accountant. He cofounded MAG Silver Corp and West Timmins Mining along with PTM. He has the scars for his endeavours: he stood beside former PTM CEO Mike Jones as he "went to business hell and back" between 2017 and 2019 following PTM's disastrous Maseve project. Hallam was previously an auditor at PwC.

BRENDAN HARRIS

CEO

Sandfire Resources

www.sandfire.com.au

FLAG

News is about to happen here

‘Motheo is well placed to be a low-cost, highly cash-generative operation for our shareholders for many years to come’

SHARES in Sandfire Resources hit a A$7/share high in April last year just as Brendan Harris took the baton from long-standing CEO Karl Simich. The reason was the first-quarter commissioning of the firm’s Motheo copper mine in Botswana. The mine’s success is key to Harris and Sandfire, especially an expansion now underway that will take Motheo’s output to about 55,000 tons of copper metal a year by 2025 from a current annual run-rate of around 34,000 tons. Sandfire posted a $45.3m loss for the 12 months ended June after absorbing a massive $270m amortisation and depreciation charge on the mineral reserves of MATSA, a 99,000 tons/year copper mine in Spain that Simich bought, partly financed with equity. The acquisition also contributed towards year-end net debt of $430m, which had increased to $454m in the September quarter, some of which is due to a scaled-up financing facility aimed at supporting Motheo’s expansion. What this number-crunching amounts to is that Harris’s key task over the coming years is to translate some feverish M&A into returns. So far investors seem happy as the stock ended the year nearly a quarter higher. In the end, investment of the scale Sandfire has taken is a fundamental call on the long-term outlook for the copper. The market seems balanced currently but Harris is adamant the outlook is bright. Shareholders will also be heartened by the recent takeover of Motheo’s neighbour Khoemacau by China’s MMG (for $1.6bn) suggesting the Kalahari copperbelt, where both mines are situated, remains a tasty long-term prospect. Harris has sanctioned budget for continued exploration in the region.

LIFE OF BRENDAN

Brendan Harris was previously chief human resources and commercial officer at South32. He was the group’s inaugural CFO following its creation through the demerger of assets from BHP in 2015. At BHP, Harris was head of investor relations. Prior to joining the Australian firm in 2010, he held various roles in investment banking, including as executive director of Macquarie Securities, where he led the metals and mining research team. He has a BSc in geology and geophysics from Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia.

TONY HARWOOD

PRESIDENT AND CEO

Montero Mining & Exploration

www.monteromining.com

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'Montero is fully funded to complete its arbitration hearings'

THE Montero share price staged what could be termed "the mother of all recoveries" for an explorer listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange last year when its price took off from a 52-week low of C$0.02 to hit a 52-week high of C$0.34 before pulling back to around C$0.19 by mid-December. The reason for that had nothing to do with the company but rather the successes obtained by two other junior miners in their disputes with the Tanzanian government. Montero is currently taking legal action against the Tanzanian government through the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) over the loss of its retention licences to the Wigu Hill Rare Earth Project. Montero is demanding C$90m in compensation. In July, Indiana Resources was awarded $109.5m by ICSID in its case against the Tanzanian government over loss of the Ntaka Hill Nickel Project which was expropriated. In September, another junior taking ICSID action against the Tanzanian government – Winshear Gold Corp. – announced it had suspended arbitration proceedings because it had reached a "conditional settlement agreement" over their claim. Montero shareholders obviously reckoned those decisions indicated their company had a good chance of winning its claim and Harwood underscored that, pointing out Montero was using the "same lead attorney that represented both Indiana and Winshear". So it was looking good for Montero ahead of its ICSID hearings postponed to early 2024. With Wigu Hill gone, Harwood has refocused Montero's exploration efforts on Chile where it is assessing the early-stage Avispa Copper-Molybdenum Project located on a major copper porphyry trend in the northern part of the country. Avispa covers some 450km^2 of exploration licences.

LIFE OF TONY

With some 40 years experience as a geologist and 36 years in mining there's no denying that Harwood has been around the block. He is best known in South Africa for his involvement with Placer Dome where he was a vice-president. Placer Dome was heavily involved in the development of South Deep which it subsequently sold to Gold Fields with – rumour has it – Placer Dome executives heaving deep sighs of relief as a result! Harwood's other South African gig was as executive chairman of Universal Coal from 2009 to 2012. He holds a PhD from the University of Wales, Cardiff.


COPPER 360
STRONGER TOGETHER

DAVID HATHORN

CEO

Kore Potash

www.korepotash.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'The successful development of globally important potash projects such as Kola requires sustained support from all stakeholders'

GUARANTEES don't come much cheaper than the Republic of the Congo government's 'moral guarantee' to Kore Potash in August to encourage funders to support its $1.83bn Kola project. Still, this shows a mildly more supportive attitude from the government than in late 2022 when Kore was threatened with losing its operating licence if it did not make faster progress, and two senior executives were arrested without charge. Various delays have beset Kola, the biggest of which has probably been Covid-19 and its lag effects, which have delayed conclusion of an EPC contract with Sepco, the Chinese contractor. Although the Summit Consortium (consisting of Summit Africa, BRP Global, Sepco and its subcontractor ENFI) has promised to fully fund Kola's capital cost once the EPC terms are agreed, Kore needs ongoing market support for working capital. The government's threats shaved 18% off the share price immediately. Unfortunately, these delays mean Kola has missed the recent boom in potash prices that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but there seems to be no lack of commitment on management's part to advancing the Kola project speedily. Hathorn, who has been acting CEO since end-November after the resignation of Brad Sampson, recently became an 8.2% shareholder of the company by contributing $750 000 to Kore's latest $2.5m share issue to help fund Kola. Sepco is expected to deliver its funding proposal in the first quarter of this year and Hathorn hopes contractors will start to mobilise on site soon afterwards. Kola is one of three potential Kore Potash projects in that country, but the company may sell the Dougou Extension project to help raise funds.

LIFE OF DAVID

Hathorn is a former CEO of Mondi, the paper producer formerly owned by Anglo American. He joined Anglo in 1989 as a divisional finance manager and was appointed to head Mondi in 2000, becoming a member of Anglo's group executive committee. Anglo divested from Mondi seven years later. He continued to run the group very successfully, spearheading its international diversification, until his 'retirement' in 2017, at only 56. He was educated at Hilton College and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where he studied for a BCom. He is a CA and CFA.

SEAN HEATHCOTE

CEO

Neo Energy Metals

www.neoenergymetals.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We're very happy with where the market is sitting. It's a perfect time for us'

NEO Energy Metals is one of several resource development companies to open their doors in South Africa. The model is to find previously drilled resources with energy transition credentials, seed the company with starter capital, and list it in a liquid offshore market. For Heathcote, the resource is Henkries, a uranium prospect 80km from Springbok in the Northern Cape. And the market is London which, curiously, doesn't have another uranium development play, handing Neo Energy Metals some novelty cachet. It also has £5m in capital of which £3.5m has been supplied by Quinton van der Burgh, the billionaire resources entrepreneur. QvdB, as he is known, cut his teeth in cellphone sales before, he claims, developing 47 mining projects over a 19-year career. First stop for Heathcote post the UK listing is to update a feasibility study completed by Anglo American in the mid-1970s which was the start of some $30m in drilling history behind Henkries. The prospect is shallow and well served by infrastructure while its location near Namibia also provides some geological pedigree. But the real value catalyst, the je nais se quoi in this sugary compote, is a looming uranium supply deficit. Or so the experts say. According to the World Nuclear Association, global uranium demand is forecast to grow about a third by 2030 while supply falls 50%. That means a doubling in the development pipeline is needed, the association says.

LIFE OF SEAN

An extremely diverse career spanning 33 years and starting at BHP Billiton, Heathcote has worked in civil construction, resource software development, resource industry lobbying, security, traffic management and business consultancy. A major portion of this time has been in South Africa to which he now returns – but in truth, Heathcote's CV shapes like that of a restlessly intellectual nomad. He is a metallurgist by trade, having earned his ticket to ride at London's prestigious Imperial College, from which he received an "outstanding contribution" award in 1990.

NEIL HERBERT

CHAIRPERSON

Atlantic Lithium

www.atlanticlithium.com.au

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We believe that Ewoyaa will showcase the Central Region and Ghana more broadly as a highly attractive mining investment jurisdiction'

GHANA has long been known as a major African gold producer and was also at the forefront over a decade ago of the renewed scramble for hydrocarbon sources in the continent. Now, in the wake of a newly developed Green Minerals Policy, the West African country is in the thick of a scramble for the green metals needed to wean the global economy off fossil fuels. Enter Atlantic Lithium. Chaired by Herbert, Atlantic Lithium is hoping its flagship Ewoyaa Project will become Ghana's first lithium mine. In October, the project got a major boost when Ghana's Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources granted it a mining lease – the first for a lithium deposit – that opens the path to commercial production. Atlantic maintains the project is well down the global cost curve and has the potential for a 2.7 million ton a year steady state operation, producing a total of 3.6Mt of spodumene concentrate (approximately 350,000 tons a year) over a 12-year mine life. Spodumene is the most widely exploited mineral source for lithium extraction, and Ewoyaa is on track to become one of the top 10 largest spodumene concentrate producers globally. The development cost is estimated at $185m, and part of the funding will come from a planned investment by Ghana's sovereign wealth fund. With over 30 years of experience in finance, Herbert has a track record of growing mining and oil and gas companies but his ability to add value is under scrutiny after Atlantic Lithium turned down two takeover offers from 24.54% shareholder Assore last year. Assore bid 33 pence a share sending Atlantic Lithium shares to 28p. The stock is now about 22p.

LIFE OF NEIL

Herbert is a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. Previous roles have included a stint as co-chairperson and managing director of AIM-quoted Polo Resources Ltd, a natural resources investment company. He has also served on the boards of numerous companies and been involved in acquisitions, disposals, and listings. He has a joint honours degree in economics and economic history from the University of Leicester.

HAKAINDE HICHILEMA

PRESIDENT

Republic of Zambia

www.zamportal.gov.zm

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

‘We cannot simply parrot lines about how democracy is good for citizens. It must be felt. Democracy is delicate’

“A breath of fresh air”; “sensible”; “pragmatic” – this is how international investors have described Hakainde Hichilema – also known as HH – who became Zambia’s president in 2021. Under his leadership, mining in the country has attracted renewed activity from international miners. Some of the international mining firms include First Quantum Minerals, Anglo American, and more recently KoBold Metals, a Californian-based metals explorer, with millions of dollars of investments boosting Zambia’s state coffers. Hichilema unfortunately has had to deal with numerous legacy problems created by his predecessors, such as an unstable tax regime and ever-changing mining policies. Investor confidence does not change overnight, and the initial promises he made have been slow to come to fruition. The positives of a Hichilema presidency, however, might be overshadowed after the seeming collapse of Zambia’s debt restructuring arrangements, which, despite being painstakingly negotiated for months, are at risk of derailing. In June 2023, the Zambian government agreed that $6bn in debt be rearranged over a minimum 20 years with a three-year grace period. But the entire deal is at risk after the G20’s creditor committee rejected it on the grounds it breached the principle that no creditor should receive more favourable treatment than others. This is a blow to Hichilema’s efforts to undo the wasteful expenditure of his predecessor, Edgar Lungu. Hichilema’s image could also be tarnished by reports that he has been cracking down on political rivals. According to the Law Association of Zambia, his political opponents are increasingly being victimised. A case in point was the recent arrest of Fred M’membe, leader of the Socialist Party of Zambia and a former journalist, on charges of espionage.

LIFE OF HAKAINDE

Hichilema holds a BA in Economics and Business Administration from the University of Zambia and an MBA from the University of Birmingham in Britain. His corporate career in the business world includes stints as CEO at then Coopers & Lybrand and later Grant Thornton. Hichilema is also a trained business negotiator, a qualified change management practitioner, and a former member of the Zambia Institute of Directors. Considered a self-made businessman because of his commercial cattle farming and investments in the country’s tourism sector, Hichelema became leader of Zambia’s United Party for National Development in 2006. He contested five previous elections between 2006 and 2016.

TERRY HOLOHAN

CEO

Resolute Mining

www.rml.com.au

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'Operational stability has reflected in Resolute's financials. In the third quarter, it turned net cash amid a buoyant gold price'

TERRY Holohan's no-nonsense, back-to-basics approach at Resolute Mining has worked a treat. One doesn't want to jinx the gold miner but based on the share price performance of last year, the company is set fair for 2024. Resolute was in a pickle when Holohan took over in 2021: net debt was $229m and its flagship asset, the Syama mine in Mali, was beset with operational problems. To make matters worse, Mali suffered two military coups in 2020 and 2021, raising sovereign risk over Resolute's investment case. While the West African country's problems have, at best, remained unchanged since then, Holohan has re-established Syama as an asset of substance. A $52m first-phase expansion will see production exceed 250,000 ounces a year while the mine's life has been extended with the delineation of 9.1 million oz in total measured and indicated resource. Holohan's contention is there aren't many world-class gold mines in Africa doing Syama's current output and with a 10-year mine life including a maiden resource at the Syama North section. Mako, Resolute's only other asset, is facing closure by the end of 2025 unless reserves can be proven. Holohan says he is growing "more confident" of this happening. For now, the mine is expected to produce 130,000 to 140,000 oz/year with stockpiles due to be treated in 2026. Resolute has also set about regional exploration. Four prospects are being drilled in Guinea while closer to home, Resolute signed the Kolondieba joint venture with Marvel Gold at Syama. This operational stability has reflected in Resolute's financials. In the third quarter, the company turned net cash. Amid a buoyant dollar gold price, this is uplifting news indeed.

LIFE OF TERRY

Holohan joined Resolute in 2021 before taking up the leadership last year. He brings to bear an extensive 40-year career that started in the 1980s and 1990s in the Zimbabwean and South African processing wheelhouses of Gencor, Impala Platinum and then Anglo American Platinum. From 2003, he was senior vice president at Ivanhoe Nickel and Platinum before leaving in 2006 to head exploration at the ill-fated Platmin. Then came a period in Asia before taking up the challenge at Resolute. He is a graduate of the University of Leeds.

MARTIN HORGAN

CEO

Centamin

www.centamin.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

‘No one need worry we are going on a spending spree with the company’s credit card’

SINCE becoming CEO of UK-listed Centamin, Martin Horgan’s focus has been on restoring the firm’s Egyptian mine Sukari to its former glory. So far, so good. In December, Centamin announced a further 500,000 ounces in new reserves at Sukari, which builds on the 5.3 million oz new life of mine reserve plan published in October 2023. Under the plan Sukari will average 506,000 oz/year for the next nine years, equal to a 5% increase in total gold output. This is a major advance on the 400,000 to 450,000 oz levels prior to 2020 when Horgan was appointed. There are “multiple opportunities” to further expand Sukari via surface satellite deposits as well as other licences adjacent to the mine, he claims. It will therefore come as some relief to Horgan that in November the Egyptian Supreme Administrative Court finally set aside a 2011 third-party challenge to the validity of Sukari’s exploitation licence. But it’s not only about Sukari for Horgan. Brought in following the successful development of Toro Gold’s Mako mine in Senegal (which was sold to Resolute Mining), Horgan is also working on regional development. In June, Centamin published the findings of a prefeasibility study for the Côte d’Ivoire prospect Doropo. The study found Doropo would cost $349m to develop and produce 173,000 oz/year over 10 years at an all-in sustaining cost of $1.017/oz. Updated gold reserve numbers on Doropo are due by the middle of this year when the results of a maiden drilling campaign across Centamin’s Egyptian exploration portfolio are published. Horgan is a developer of mines rather than an M&A maven, hence his declaration to shareholders last year that they should not expect big-spending dealmaking. Production for the year will be between 470,000 and 500,000 oz.

LIFE OF MARTIN

Horgan, a University of Leeds graduate in mining engineering, was previously executive director of BDI Mining, an AIM-listed diamond producer. From 2000 to 2006, he was a mining finance banker at Barclays Capital. A born-and-bred Mancunian, he is a lifelong supporter of Manchester United Football Club, hence his occasional fondness for speaking in footie terms.

RICHARD HYDE

CEO

West African Resources

www.westafricanresources.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We would rather work on good projects in a challenging jurisdiction than challenging projects in a better jurisidiction'

WEST African Resources got a bit of a kicking in October after Burkina Faso upped its gold royalty rate. Shares in the company slid to a 12-month low. Outside of jurisdictional risk, however, life has gone swimmingly for Richard Hyde's company. But he's realistic about sovereign risk in Burkina Faso where West African operates the 230,000-ounce-a-year Sanbrado Gold Project. "We go to Africa because the projects are better," he told the *Australian Financial Review* in April. Investors tend to apply a discount to political risk but Hyde thinks over time the fabulous net profits West African has been generating will speak louder than political turmoil. Certainly lenders haven't been put off by Burkina Faso's troubles. In June Sprott Resource Lending Corp. and Coris Bank International agreed to fund $265m of the $430m required to build West African's second mine, Kiaka, a deposit near Sanbrado the firm bought from Canadian miner B2Gold. The balance of Kiaka, which will take West African's production north of 400,000 oz/year from 2025 for 10 years, will be funded from cash and internally generated cash flow. Returning to the question of political risk, national security was top of Hyde's agenda when in October his company announced plans to sign a memorandum of understanding with Orezone which will work on improving protective measures for their neighbouring properties as well as "drive synergies" on renewable and grid power, procurement and other supply chain issues. In December, Hyde said a scoping study found potential to displace low-grade open-pit ore at Sanbrado with underground more in an extension project that will add 35,000 oz/year to production for five years.

LIFE OF RICHARD

Hyde is a geologist with 25 years' experience in the mining industry and over 20 years' experience operating in West Africa. In his time, he's managed large exploration and development projects for gold and base metals in Australia, Africa and Eastern Europe. He founded West African in 2006 and has led the company from IPO in 2010 through to production in 2020. He was instrumental in putting together the A$365m debt and equity financing to fund Sanbrado in March 2020. Hyde holds a BSc degree in geology and geophysics from the University of New England and is a member of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy as well as the Australian Institute of Geoscientists.

DAVID JARVIS

INTERIM CEO

Industrial Development Corporation

www.idc.co.za

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'We couldn't be prouder after posting historic funding and investment activity'

WITH the departure of TP Nchocho as CEO at the end of 2023, it fell to Jarvis to commandeer the wheel at the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). As the longest-serving member of the IDC's executive team, Jarvis was an obvious choice. Nchocho left the IDC on good terms in a year in which the development funder approved a record number of funding requests. It also recorded a profit for the second year in a row after a poor performance in 2020. The IDC has also managed to increase its involvement in South Africa's clean energy space. Along with international and regional financiers, the IDC agreed to contribute to South Africa's special green hydrogen fund to finance hydrogen-related projects. Following the Brics summit in August, an agreement was signed with the Bank of China to fund projects in energy and mining, among others. The IDC also clinched funding and cooperation deals with Spanish state-owned enterprise COFIDES and Saudi Arabian Power Company ACWA for clean energy investments in the coming years. As for current investments and loans, the IDC's involvement with the non-performing Northern Cape manganese mine of Kalagadi Resources is still problematic. The IDC's application to have it placed in business rescue is legally contested, with no solution in sight, at least not for the foreseeable future. On the upside, the fortunes of Foskor – another one of the IDC's chronic non-performing assets – improved when the Phalaborwa-based phosphate miner reported a R2.8bn profit for the first time since 2012. This reignited hopes that Foskor could list on the JSE, which would attract much-needed investor capital though, to be honest, is there anyone who thinks this will ever really happen?

LIFE OF DAVID

Jarvis holds a Master's degree in Industrial, Organisational and Labour Studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He started his career as a researcher for the Trade Union Research Project in 1993. In 2000 he joined the National Labour and Economic Development Institute, heading up the strategies unit. In 2005, he accepted a position at the Department of Trade and Industry in the office of the director-general and later headed the economic research and policy coordination unit. In 2009, Jarvis became head of research at the Development Bank of Southern Africa. He joined the IDC in 2013 as head of corporate strategy and portfolio management – a position he still holds while also acting as interim CEO.

CLIVE JOHNSON

CEO

B2Gold

www.b2gold.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We remain convinced that the government of Mali wants more gold mining in the country and wants people like ourselves'

A LOT of B2Gold newsflow last year was focused on the firm's non-African growth ambitions. Notably these included a $60m payment to AngloGold Ashanti for the Colombian prospect Gramalote, which B2Gold intends to develop single-handedly, and the C$890m development of the Goose Project in Canada following the C$1.1bn acquisition of Sabina Gold & Silver Corp. in April 2023. Yet Africa remains (at least for now) the centre of Johnson's growing empire especially as the firm's Fekola mine in Mali generates roughly two-thirds of one million ounces in B2Gold's annual gold production. As mentioned in previous editions of *Rainmakers & Potstirrers*, Johnson sees Fekola increasing output to 800,000 oz/year. An optimisation study that will support a new $250m mill to be situated at the Anaconda Area 20km from Fekola is, at the time of writing, imminent. B2Gold upgraded indicated resources from the Anaconda Area 80% to just over two million oz. Fekola has been an enormous success for B2Gold. Developed in 2017, the mine produced 110,000 oz in its first quarter, surprising its engineers who had previously developed B2Gold's first mine, Otjikoto, in Namibia two years earlier. Otjikoto's open pit is now being closed as its reserves are depleted. An underground expansion to replace gold output from the open pit is underway. As for Mali, Johnson remains committed to expansion. This, at least, was his response when asked if a new mining code in Mali, signed into law in August, would deter investment. The code will enable the state and local investors to take stakes in mining projects of as much as 35%. It comes as Mali inches closer to Russia for financial and political support. Ominously, the United Nations has closed its local office in Bamako.

LIFE OF CLIVE

Johnson established his reputation with Bema Gold, which was bought by Kinross in 2007 for C$3.5bn. He then regrouped with former Bema colleagues to establish B2Gold, which embarked on an aggressive acquisition strategy, culminating in the $570m purchase of Papillon Resources in 2014. Interestingly for a Canadian, he played rugby union and occasionally takes a robust approach to critical analysts. In 2021, he sanctioned the company's initiative to use proceeds from specially minted Rhino Gold Bars to protect the critically endangered black rhino population in Namibia, where B2Gold developed the Otjikoto mine.

GRAHAM KERR

CEO

South32

www.south32.net

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'I think the industrial relations reforms are going to set back productivity'

SOUTH32's Graham Kerr navigated one of the stormier years in the company's eight-year existence. It was forced to scale down operations at its Cerro Matoso ferronickel mine in Colombia due to a benefits-related community protest. At its Mozal aluminium smelter in Mozambique there were two fatalities following an accident. In South Africa the logistical headaches caused by Transnet's inadequate rail and port infrastructure went from bad to worse in the fourth quarter, adversely affecting manganese ore sales. The headwinds for its manganese operations started at the end of 2022, when South32 lost 15% of its rail allocation to emerging and junior miners. As a result, large volumes of the commodity had to move from rail to truck transport via roads. Kerr warned it would be difficult for South32 to compete globally if the situation persisted. Another hurdle is electricity generation at South32's Hillside aluminium smelter. South32 is in a quest to secure lower carbon electricity supply for its Hillside operations. Currently, it relies on Eskom's coal-fired power stations. Failing to move to cleaner energy will mean South African-produced manganese will incur cross-border carbon tax for its exports to Europe. South32 is exploring the possibility of procuring electricity generated at the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station, and investigating wind and solar power generation options over the medium and longer term. There are also challenges on South32's home ground: Australian miners could potentially face steep increases in labour costs as their government is considering a so-called 'same job, same pay' policy, requiring employers to pay hire workers the same rate as direct employees performing the same job. Kerr warned that the policy could potentially harm the industry.

LIFE OF GRAHAM

Kerr, an accountant, holds degrees from the Edith Cowan and Deakin universities in Australia. After his studies, he joined the diversified mining house BHP, where he held positions in South Africa, South America, North America and Australia. In 2015, he was appointed CEO of South32, a spin-off from BHP. Kerr is an advocate for gender equality in the workplace and is director of CEOs for Gender Equity, a grouping of business leaders who lobby for gender equity in Western Australia.

WILLIAM LAMB

CEO

Lucara Diamond Corp.

www.lucaradiamond.com

'We have had constructive discussions with the Botswana president and ministry and expect a new sales channel in short order'

LUCARA Diamond's world came crashing in last year when the firm announced the underground extension of its Karowe Diamond Mine in Botswana – its only operating asset – would take 18 months longer to complete, putting the entire company at huge risk. The main implication of the delay was a significant increase in its capital cost to $683m as well as later-than-planned cash flow just as the mine's open-pit reserves ran down. Unfortunately for Lucara, this bad news landed just as project capital and debt repayment obligations fell due and as global diamond prices slumped amid a large supply surplus. Lucara's balance sheet was in deep, deep trouble. Lucara's 24.5% shareholder Lundin Group rushed to the firm's support, but the die was cast for Eira Thomas, Lucara's CEO of five years, who promptly resigned in August. In stepped William Lamb, a former CEO of Lucara whose priority is now to secure working capital extensions as well as a new sales agreement with the Botswana government. This was after Lucara in September cancelled a sales deal with HB Antwerp for high-value stones citing "a material breach of financial commitments". As a 24% shareholder in HB Antwerp, the Botswana government was also left looking for alternative sales arrangements. Owing to these constraints, Lucara slashed sales guidance for 2023 while production and sales volumes for this year have also been cut year-on-year. Amid the financial mayhem, Glenn Kondo, another former Lucara employee, returns to the company as its CFO.

LIFE OF WILLIAM

After leaving Lucara in 2018 where he had been CEO and president for 10 years, Lamb set up his own consulting business – WLP – which he ran for five years from Vancouver. He then decamped to Toronto where he joined NewGen Resource Lending as its partner and chief technical officer. Clearly, he could not but heed the SOS from Lucara. Prior to Lucara, Lamb earned his stripes at De Beers in various technical roles, but life in mining began at Rand Mines where he helped mine diamonds' dark alter ego, coal.

MARK LEARMONTH

CEO

Caledonia Mining

www.caledoniamining.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'The market may not be there for us, in which case there's no point in trying to pursue a dream that's not available'

MARK Learmonth will most likely opt for the phased development of Caledonia Mining's project, the $250m Bilboes brownfields mine near Bulawayo. We suspect, however, that this is not his preference. Learmonth is temperamentally less conservative than his predecessor at Caledonia, Steve Curtis. Under Curtis, Caledonia took seven years to fund the $150m expansion of Blanket. Granted, there were good reasons for this: as Blanket is Caledonia's only operating asset, Curtis couldn't over-leverage the balance sheet. Consequently, Caledonia relied on internally generated cash flows to fund Blanket. (It should also be noted that Learmonth was Caledonia's CFO during most of this time.) While it's a good time to raise money for gold expansion, Zimbabwe remains beset with risk and, in any event, Caledonia has a dividend to protect. The quarterly payout has been increased about eight times in three years therefore shareholders would not take it lightly were this compromised. For these reasons, Learmonth's ambition to take Caledonia's production to 250,000 ounces a year from its current 80,000 oz in one slug will be tempered with restraint. Meanwhile, the company shelved oxide production from Bilboes. Learmonth said this was "disappointing" but added it had no bearing on the feasibility of Bilboes's sulphide deposit which was the reason for the firm's $53.3m all-share purchase in 2021. Elsewhere in the business, Caledonia started first phase exploration at its Motata prospect. It has also started drilling at Blanket which may yield economic gold production from yet deeper levels. Caledonia is losing the services of its COO Dana Roets after 10 years' service. Responsible for overseeing Blanket's expansion, Roets stepped down in November 2023.

LIFE OF MARK

Mark Learmonth joined Caledonia in 2008 and became the company's CFO in 2014. Before this he was a division director at Macquarie First South, which formed part of 17 years' experience in corporate and investment finance in South Africa, most of it in resources. He graduated from Oxford University and is a chartered accountant. He is a member of the executive committee of Zimbabwe's Chamber of Mines.

KEITH LIDDELL

CHAIRPERSON

Lifezone Metals

www.lifezonemetals.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

‘The contention is Hydromet is a far cleaner and cheaper way of processing metal ores such as nickel which Lifezone holds in abundance via its Tanzanian subsidiary, Kabanga Nickel’

KEITH Liddell described the listing of Lifezone Metals in New York in June last year as a major milestone in more than 30 years of promoting his bespoke Hydromet smelting technology. His contention is the technology is a cleaner and cheaper way of processing metal ores such as nickel which – not so incidentally – Lifezone holds in abundance via its Tanzanian subsidiary Kabanga Nickel. If Liddell’s masterplan materialises, Hydromet facilities will process first ore from Kabanga in 2026. Liddell’s vision has been supported so far: Lifezone holds \$86m in cash following the reverse takeover by listed blank cheque company GoGreen Investments while in February 2023 BHP paid the second tranche of a total \$100m investment in Kabanga Nickel. What’s needed now is for Kabanga to conclude commercial offtake agreements which will support the pre-production capital financing, a process that began in April last year. It would help, though, if the nickel market played ball. The metal’s price shed 45% in 2023, and the outlook is not great for 2024. According to an International Nickel Study Group forecast in August, the nickel market is heading for a 239,000-ton supply surplus taking the three-year cumulative surplus to 566,000t. You don’t pioneer new technology for 30 years by being swayed by short-term markets, however. Liddell is therefore forging onwards. In July, Lifezone bought long-standing business partner The Stimulus Group, a Perth-based hydrometallurgical laboratory, that will help further vertically integrate Lifezone. A memorandum of understanding is also to be signed with Glencore to process its platinum group metals by-products.

LIFE OF KEITH

As a metallurgist of more than 30 years’ standing, Keith Liddell’s Hydromet technology – or ‘Kell Process’ – is his ‘white whale’. He unsuccessfully strove for the technology’s adoption in Zimbabwe’s PGMs sector after failing to get investment from South Africa where, as MD of Aquarius Platinum, he developed the Kroondal Mine. Liddell has also been involved in gold, PGM and nickel exploration in Australia while his Mineral Securities Ltd. invested in Sedibelo Platinum Mines in South Africa. He currently chairs Colomi Singapore and is a director of Cornish Lithium and Tombador Iron.

COBUS LOOTS

CEO

Pan African Resources

www.panafricanresources.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'Our dividend yield is right up there versus any of the international companies in terms of portfolio growth'

ANOTHER year but the same old story as the Pan African share price stubbornly refused to perform despite the gold price going through the $2,000-per-ounce mark several times during 2023 and the rand gold price going as high as R1.2m per kilogram. By mid-December the Pan African share price at 395c was pretty much where it started the year in January at around 370c while Gold Fields was up 64% over this period and DRDGold 36% higher. That underperformance may lie behind the action of half of Pan African's shareholders who voted at the AGM in November to reject the company's executive pay scheme. In terms of the 2023 scheme Loots will get paid a total remuneration of $2.07m compared with $1.4m under the 2022 implementation plan. Clearly Loots getting a 48% pay rise while the share price underperforms is sticking in shareholders' craws. The main problem last year was that Pan African fell short on its production guidance which it was forced to revise to 175,000 ounces for the year to June from the previous estimate of 195,000 to 205,000 oz. Loots expects a recovery in financial 2024 to at least 180,000 to 190,000 oz following a bullish January production update with a further step-up in the 2025 financial year but that depends on the successful commissioning of the Mogale Tailings Retreatment plant at Mintails. As of November, Loots was sounding upbeat with commissioning on track while the various operations were performing either in line with predictions or beating those predictions. Mintails is expected to start production at the end of 2024 and add some 50,000 oz/year to group production boosting total annual output by about 25%.

LIFE OF COBUS

He's a chartered accountant who qualified with Deloitte & Touche. He got into mining using the finance route and also the black economic empowerment route working for Shanduka Resources – the group founded and initially headed up by now South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. Shanduka became Pan African's black economic empowerment partner and Loots was appointed a director in 2009. He became CFO in 2013 and CEO in March 2015 when he replaced Jan Nelson. Speculation was that Nelson was forced out by Shanduka to make way for Loots.

LOUIS LOUBSER

CEO

Kropz

www.kropz.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'Further challenges can be expected from Elandsfontein as it progresses towards full production'

LOUIS Loubser has faced an intimidating list of challenges since taking on the role of CEO at Kropz in January 2023. On the face of it, Kropz's main and only operating asset, the Elandsfontein phosphate mine on South Africa's West Coast, has a very desirable, high-grade deposit. But bringing it into full profitable production is proving elusive. The list of problems that have bedevilled the mine since 2017 include opposition from environmentalists to the granting of a water-use licence, logistics obstacles, delays due to Covid-19 (of course), and the discovery of sections of hard material in the deposit. Altogether, these issues have pushed out first production by five years, sucked up way more capital than originally budgeted for, and delayed ramp-up and commissioning. The mine, which is still in its trial mining phase, has encountered more production hitches from extremely wet weather in the Western Cape. As a new entrant to the market, Kropz is selling its initial output at below-market prices. It has survived for all these years thanks to support from its long-suffering major shareholder, African Rainbow Capital (ARC), but as a result of many years of little or no revenue, it is now labouring under a heavy debt obligation. It has been in negotiations with BNP Paribas, which it owes $18.75m, about refinancing the loan, and to date the obligation to ARC has spiralled to about $66m, some of which is debt and some of which is convertible into equity. Kropz's second asset is the Hinda phosphate project in the Republic of the Congo, where Loubser is proceeding cautiously, starting with a low-capex project to prove the viability of producing and exporting phosphate in the country.

LIFE OF LOUIS

Loubser brings the hands-on operational experience that Kropz needs to become a sustainable operation. He is an interesting mixture: a BCom graduate with a certificate in international quarry management and an MBA (cum laude). Combining these skills has taken him far: from MD of Infrasors (an industrial minerals company, part of the Afrimat group) to CEO of the Mooiplaats Colliery, which he turned from loss to profit during his tenure from 2018 to end-2022. One of his non-mining roles is as an alternate director of Kagga Kamma Nature Reserve in the Cederberg.

JAMES MACKAY

CEO

Energy Council of South Africa

www.energycouncil.co.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'We will need reliable coal-driven power stations for decades to come'

SINCE his appointment as the first CEO of the Energy Council of South Africa in 2022, James Mackay has raised concerns about risks of being too slow at decarbonisation while cautioning that the transition to green energy in South Africa will take decades. In an interview, Mackay bemoaned the country's lack of green technology innovation and the real risk of being shut out of global trade. But it's a complex debate because he has also argued for fossil fuels. In a recent open editorial, he stressed the need for reliable coal power stations "for decades to come". Dovetailing renewable and coal energy is partly a function of Mackay's concern that despite building primary wind and solar plants, South Africa doesn't have the distribution infrastructure. On this theme he's also posed the inconvenient question of how exactly South Africa's mining companies expect to deliver on their ambitious renewable energy plans given this deficit. Mackay is, however, optimistic about the country's ability to end load-shedding "as early as 2024" notwithstanding economists' and Eskom's estimates that it will be around for years. The Energy Council came into being at the end of 2021 after calls from Mineral Resources and Energy Minister Gwede Mantashe that big business should sing from the same hymn sheet. The Energy Council's founding members were energy-intensive industries such as Sasol, Exxaro, Anglo American and Toyota, as well as state-owned enterprises Eskom, the Industrial Development Corporation and the Central Energy Fund. At the time, critics complained about the absence of players in the renewable energy and storage market, but the Energy Council promised to broaden its membership. Two years down the line a handful of renewable energy and storage companies have joined as members.

LIFE OF JAMES

Mackay has a CA (SA), a BSc Engineering degree from the University of Cape Town and a certificate in Infrastructure Financing from Harvard University. His corporate experience includes positions at Sappi, where he was an engineer, and at EY in an auditing capacity. He also held positions at the Industrial Development Corporation as an investment banker in 2005 and 2006. From 2007 to 2017 he had various executive managerial positions at Transnet, where he managed the iron ore and manganese operations, and assisted the state-owned entity with securing private-sector funding for infrastructure development. Prior to his appointment at the Energy Council of South Africa, he was an associate director at PwC.

DANIEL MAJOR

CEO

GoviEx Uranium

www.goviex.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'The deteriorating relationship between Niger and France will be a concern especially as Niger is Europe's largest supplier of uranium oxide'

GOVIEX said in a November corporate presentation that its investment case was "gathering momentum". That's surely putting a brave face on a difficult and frustrating year for the uranium mine developer. The world changed for GoviEx in July last year when Niger suffered a coup – the latest in a series of African political crises stretching from Burkina Faso to Sudan – with the military junta stridently anti-West in outlook. The coup came just as Major was seeking offtake agreements for GoviEx's $343m, 2.67-million-pounds-a-year Madaouela project in eastern Niger. The crisis sent GoviEx shares to a three-year low, an unhelpful development especially as a portion of the proposed finance is to be in equity. Cruelly, uranium prices hit a 15-year high of more than $80/lb around the same time. It was a demonstration of supply-and-demand dynamics in uranium about which Major has been banging on since taking the helm at GoviEx. GoviEx continues to seek financing for Madaouela but it's instructive that in September it made much of a tripling in measured and indicated resources of its other main project, Muntanga in Zambia, which it said highlighted its "global presence". The deteriorating relationship between Niger and former coloniser France will be a concern especially as Niger is Europe's largest supplier of uranium oxide. Despite this, GoviEx has been able to capitalise itself with 'bought' deals in May (C$15m) and December (C$13.8m). One other setback for Major was the failure of a proposed C$5.5m sale of its Falea project in Mali to African Energy Metals. The buyer failed to "complete its obligations for closing", said GoviEx.

LIFE OF DANIEL

Major studied at Camborne School of Mines in Cornwall, once the capital of the UK's mining industry. In his 30 years in mining, he's worked at Rio Tinto's Rössing uranium mine in Namibia and for Anglo American Platinum in South Africa. He then dipped out of the operational side of things and took up a role as a mining analyst with HSBC and then subsequently JP-Morgan Chase. Since then, he's held several roles in Russia, Canada and South America, and has been with GoviEx since 2012.

JULIUS MALEMA

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

Economic Freedom Fighters

www.effonline.org

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'The EFF is going to be the government and when the EFF is in government, we are going to defeat poverty, inequality, unemployment, crime'

THE firebrand leader of South Africa's third-largest political party kept himself in the limelight in 2023. The 10th anniversary celebrations in July of the party he founded, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), known as the 'red berets', included a packed rally at the FNB Stadium in Soweto. Malema used the occasion to stoke his populist brand of racial politics, leading the crowd in a chant of 'Kill the boer, kill the farmer'. For the mining sector, Malema's calls for nationalisation have the power of unnerving foreign investors. While his party's prospects of winning power at national level are limited, to say the least, the EFF is still expected to win between 9% and 18% of the vote in this year's national election. It won 10.8% in 2019. The party's main impact is as a coalition partner at local government level, where it has often proved an unreliable player. Malema's critics label him a fascist as he attempts to tap swelling discontent among the poor black majority in the face of glaring failures by the ruling African National Congress (ANC). The EFF is an ANC breakaway and has certainly cost the party of Nelson Mandela votes; most polls show the ANC falling below 50% in 2024 for the first time since it gained power in 1994. Still, there are limits to Malema's appeal: an attempt to stage a national shutdown in March turned into a damp squib as few people heeded the EFF's calls to stay home. South Africans who are fortunate enough to have a job are hardly going to miss a day's pay in a low-growth economy with an unemployment rate of over 30%.

LIFE OF JULIUS

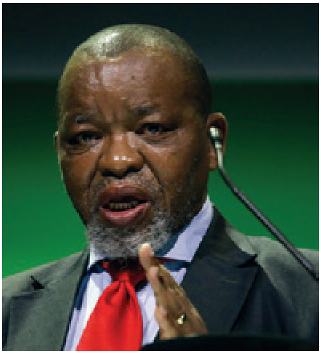
Malema cut his political teeth in the ANC's Youth League, becoming national leader in 2008. A once strident supporter of disgraced former South African president Jacob Zuma, he had a spectacular falling out with him that led to Malema's expulsion from the ANC in 2012. Malema then founded the EFF, an ultra-left party that wants to nationalise the economy, with a focus on land and the mining and banking sectors. Like many ANC members, Malema has a long list of corruption and looting allegations against him.

GWEDE MANTASHE

MINISTER MINERAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY

South Africa

www.dmr.gov.za



HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'You can't rule out that some of the funding comes from the CIA and is deliberate to block development in a poor country like South Africa'

NEVER far from controversy, Gwede Mantashe made headlines by creating suspicion regarding the intentions of environmental activists and NGOs. Mantashe is a staunch supporter of coal and the exploration of oil and gas, but he went a step further by blatantly accusing civil organisations of deliberately blocking progress and development in South Africa. The attack on NGOs is most likely an attempt to distract from Mantashe's dubious track record as political head of Mineral Resources and Energy. He has repeatedly commented on the imminence of new mining cadastre, but self-imposed deadlines have come and gone with depressing regularity. A promise last year he was working on a new specialised policing aimed at cracking down on illegal mining has also come to naught. Meanwhile a confusing exploration strategy appears to insist on empowerment even though he promised not to do this. His department has also dragged its feet with acquiring new electricity generation capacity. With the exception of the first bidding round for 513MW of battery storage, there were no purchases until December. Then officials sprang into action. Out of the blue, there was an announcement South Africa will embark on a 2,500MW nuclear power-building programme. Two days later, his department announced purchases of solar and wind power, and battery storage capacity. Mantashe also submitted to Cabinet the long-overdue Integrated Resource Plan, which will determine how much generation capacity is needed and by when. The crucial plan has been delayed since 2019. To what can we attribute this feverish activity? National elections, of course, due in May. The hope is that voters will forget that in 2023 there were 86% more blackouts than any other year.

LIFE OF GWEDE

Mantashe hails from Cala, a village in the Eastern Cape. A former miner and trade unionist, he rose to prominence in the ANC during the presidency of Jacob Zuma when he became the ruling party's secretary general in 2007. Mantashe was instrumental in the election of Cyril Ramaphosa as head of the party – in 2017 and in 2022. He is considered influential and politically untouchable despite his obstructionist behaviour and poor performance as South Africa's minerals and energy minister.

JOSEPH MATHUNJWA

PRESIDENT

Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union

www.amcu.co.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'These platinum mines are making trillions at the expense of black mineworkers'

JOSEPH Mathunjwa, and by extension the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu), has been an unexpected source of stability in South Africa's mining sector in recent years. The union patched up relations with its arch rival, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), uniting with it and other unions in a series of wage talks which – with notable exceptions – reached multiyear settlements without a tool being downed. But in 2023, Amcu's olive branch to business and other unions began to wither. In late October at the Gold One mine east of Johannesburg, NUM accused Amcu of taking hundreds of its members hostage during a prolonged sit-in that was effectively a wildcat strike. This is a hallmark of Amcu's traditional tactics involving allegations of intimidation. NUM subsequently terminated its closed-shop agreement, which excludes minority unions from bargaining and was the apparent source of Amcu's ire, at the mine. But more violence and wildcat action followed. Mathunjwa, a fire-and-brimstone orator, has reverted to form in his public statements: at the memorial service for 13 miners killed in a conveyance cage accident in late November at Impala Platinum's Rustenburg mine, Mathunjwa said the men who died had been "earning slave wages" – a transparent falsehood – and that the platinum mines were making "trillions" from black mine workers. In fact, South Africa's platinum group metals (PGM) sector is in deep trouble in the face of a collapse of prices. That may explain why Amcu and Mathunjwa have been returning to their militant ways. The PGM sector is bracing for a wave of potential lay-offs, a state of affairs that is bound to make labour see red.

LIFE OF JOSEPH

Mathunjwa, who hails from South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, formed Amcu in the Mpumalanga coal fields as a breakaway from NUM in 1999. The union barely registered on investor radar screens until 2012, when it dislodged NUM as the dominant union on the platinum belt. The wildcat strike is among its trademarks, including the violent one at Marikana's Lonmin mine in 2012 that culminated in the police shooting 34 striking miners dead. Mathunjwa, who is from a Salvationist background, is a fiery orator who peppers his speeches with biblical references mixed with strident calls to class warfare and African nationalism.

ZANELE MATLALA

CEO

Merafe Resources

www.meraferesources.co.za

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

‘Economic uncertainty ... is making it difficult for businesses to make long-term plans, and it also leads to volatility in the markets’

FERROCHROME producer Merafe Resources, which is in joint venture with Glencore, launched a secondary listing on the Australian Securities Exchange in June last year, raising the group’s global profile at a time when it’s facing significant headwinds. The company shares in many of the infrastructural pressures of South Africa’s troubled economy, the key one being interrupted electricity supply. As a response to this risk, Matlala throttled back production in 2023. That’s all good and well, but the extent of the national emergency on services, to which you can add rail logistics, has forced Matlala into more serious considerations including a certain difficulty in crafting long-term business plans. As a result the company would “remain cautious” in its approach, Matlala said. Despite this state of affairs Merafe has not pulled the plug on capital expenditure entirely. In September, Merafe and Glencore said they would extend an agreement to produce platinum group metals, a by-product in their chrome joint venture even though the short- to medium-term outlook for the precious metals is downbeat. This project will see the expansion of a processing plant on the eastern half of the Glencore-Merafe-controlled chrome properties. Merafe’s share of the R585m cost is R117m, reflecting its 20.5% stake in the joint venture. As of end-June, the company had over R1.6bn on its balance sheet, so it has the liquidity for the project, although the sometimes lazy aspect of Merafe’s balance sheet has been a source of frustration for minority shareholders. They may reflect, however, Matlala’s characteristic caution which has served shareholders well in the past.

LIFE OF ZANELE

A chartered accountant, Matlala was mentored by her former Merafe boss Steve Phiri, a highly respected mining executive. As a black woman, Matlala remains a relative rarity in South Africa’s mining boardrooms, to which she brings a cautious and studious demeanour. Matlala assumed the top job at Merafe in 2012 when Phiri moved to Royal Bafokeng Platinum. Her impressive CV includes a stint as CFO at the Development Bank of Southern Africa. She is also a non-executive director of Dipula Income Fund, Stefanutti Stocks Holdings Limited, and RAC Limited.

BRIAN MENELL

CEO

TechMet

www.techmet.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We will invest in projects that have a defined resource and at least a prefeasibility study, through to assets in production with expansion potential'

WHERE Brian Menell has an edge over all the other investors scrambling to put money into potentially viable critical minerals is that he has personal experience, and a long family tradition, of doing business in Africa. Many deposits of the kind of minerals that are needed to produce batteries and other systems associated with the green energy transition are to be found in less-developed countries, where regulations are often vague and ever-changing. This is a major deterrent to US and European (but not Chinese) investors, who expect transparency and consistency. Menell doesn't shy away from places like Brazil, Rwanda and South Africa. He says investment in any country is a matter of familiarity, knowledge, networks and being able to assess and manage risk to realise value from investments. TechMet proceeds cautiously, and it is highly diversified – as it heads for the magic $1bn valuation mark. In 2022, it paid its first dividend and last year successfully raised another $200m in equity funding. As an investor in these minerals, TechMet not only earns profits (if it manages them successfully) but also becomes more influential. One of its investors is the US International Development Finance Corporation, which is looking at how to secure supply of critical minerals that are largely controlled by China at present. TechMet holds a stake in LSE-listed Rainbow Rare Earths, developer of the Phalaborwa project to extract rare earths from phosphogypsum stacks, and has an option to raise its stake in the project to between 15% and 33%. Rainbow's US partner is K-Tech, which was recently invited to give input at a US Congress hearing into US critical minerals supply.

LIFE OF BRIAN

He's a former executive director of Anglovaal Mining, which was established by the Menell and Hersov families in the 1930s. He and his brother sold their interests in Anglovaal to African Rainbow Minerals in the early 2000s. Brian started his career at De Beers in 1988 before moving to Anglovaal. After the sale of the family's stake, he started a company, Kemet Group, which has invested in various natural resources projects in Africa. He established TechMet in 2017. Brian holds a BA (Hons) from the University of Pennsylvania in Political Science and Economics.

CRAIG MILLER

CEO

Anglo American Platinum

www.angloamericanplatinum.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

‘Platinum will rerate. I think palladium will remain under pressure; rhodium will rerate in some form’

YOU can’t fault Craig Miller’s healthy optimism when in his first week as CEO he made the error of telling this correspondent that platinum group metal (PGM) prices would rebound, possibly by between 15% and 20%. Alas, he – and most of the industry – were placing too much confidence in the metals’ resilience. Yes, the world needs PGMs but inventories built by automakers during the Covid pandemic, and a semi-conductor shortage, have proved harder to overcome than expected. While the signals are for a modest to moderate recovery of the PGM basket price this year, Amplats is battening down the hatches. Amid market speculation in December its parent company Anglo American discussed cutting jobs with the South African government, Amplats announced plans to slash expenses by R10bn, divided equally between operating costs and stay-in-business capital. Projects to debottleneck concentrate and refining processes were shelved; so too a third concentrator at Mogalakwena mine. The outcome is a cut in refined production over the next three years to three to 3.4 million ounces in 2025 and 2026 from 3.3 to 3.7 million oz this year. So what is in store for Miller this year? He will be judged on proving Amplats’ technical competence by meeting new cost targets, that’s for sure. But a lift from the market will certainly help his cause. The adoption of electric vehicles is the key existential threat all PGM producers fear. Amid a slowdown in EV take-up last year, the question now is the extent to which these vehicles will eat into the market for internal combustion engines which PGMs supply. Miller thinks PGM demand will be supported for longer than expected as consumers opt for hybrid vehicles.

LIFE OF CRAIG

Appointed in October 2023 following predecessor Natascha Viljoen’s surprise departure for Newmont, Miller holds an Accounting Science degree. He served his articles at Deloitte, then moved to Anglo American where he has worked for over 23 years in various capacities including group financial controller and CFO of the iron ore business in Brazil and the coal business in South Africa. He headed the group CEO’s office when Cynthia Carroll was Anglo’s leader. At Amplats, he was CFO. Miller holds his skipper’s licence and goes sailing on the Knysna lagoon with his family whenever he can.

MIKE MILLER

CEO

Mantengu Mining

www.mantengu.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'There's a negative connotation to being called a junior miner. Bigger doesn't mean better or smarter'

MIKE Miller didn't have mining in his life plan, but a desire to improve the lot of rural communities after writing a Master's degree on why black economic empowerment deals failed saw him land Mantengu Mining. That's the short version of the story. Miller said in an interview that the mining company was a means of proving his new financing model could work. Ideals aside, Miller is now focused on the grittier issue of making sure two chrome processing plants at the firm's R200m Langpan acquisition deliver on time. He previously targeted the first quarter for full production of some 25,000 to 35,000 tons of concentrate a month. Going forward, Mantengu intends to buy other assets in the mining, mining services, and energy sectors that may have come a cropper owing to failed financing. In November it signed R500m in equity financing with New York-based GEM (Global Yield Fund). While equity is expensive finance, Miller says the ability of Mantengu to immediately draw down on cash (for shares) will give him the edge in competing for assets. It's ballsy stuff for a new miner like Miller with no track record and volatile market conditions, especially as South Africa is notoriously closed to small mining. So far, the markets are sceptical. Shares in Mantengu were more than 90% weaker since the company relisted in Johannesburg in August 2022 via the reverse takeover of Mine Restoration Investments, a company Miller chaired from 2017 to 2020 where he assisted in its compliance obligations.

LIFE OF MIKE

Miller, who has a BCom and a Master's degree in finance from the University of Cape Town, served his accounting articles at Deloitte before leaving the office behind for the life of a ranger at Londolozi, the esteemed game reserve. It was there that he developed an interest in unlocking contested rural land which somehow morphed into mining. Miller was also commercial manager at Dimension Data, and founder of Disruption Capital. He has been CEO of Mantengu Mining since March 2023 having served as chair of its forerunner Mine Restoration Investments from 2017 to 2020.

DAWN MOKHOBO

CHAIRPERSON

Wesizwe Platinum

www.wesizwe.co.za

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'Our strategic intent remains to complete development, ramp up production and become a profitable business'

DAWN Makhobo may rue the day she accepted the chairperson role at Wesizwe. Its flagship Bakubung Platinum Mine, located near the gaming resort of Sun City, has proven – ironically, given its location – to be something of a gamble; in fact, one that is not paying off. In the company's 2022 annual report, Makhobo noted an outbreak of community unrest in January of that year that delayed production, and said that in response the management team had "prioritised the strengthening of our relationships with key stakeholders ... to enhance engagement, resolve legitimate concerns, and build mutually respectful relationships." Such initiatives have not gone according to plan. In late November 2023, the company announced a restructuring that could see up to 570 job cuts, triggering a new wave of unrest. In early December, around 250 miners at Bakubung staged a wildcat strike and sit-in. Most were members of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). The union said its members were angered after the company followed the lay-off announcements with ads for top management positions. The NUM protesters were also pushing for pay hikes and improved benefits. None of this bodes well for labour and community engagement going forward at a mine that has long been plagued by commissioning delays. A decade ago, the project was a relative rarity: a new platinum group metals mine being built in South Africa against the backdrop of surging levels of labour and social unrest sweeping the sector. It is now caught in the same vortex with fewer chances to roll the dice. As such, Wesizwe's Bakubung occupies an unenviable place in the country's PGM sector: as one of the white elephants that have turned asset management companies like Coronation completely off the sector.

LIFE OF DAWN

Mokhobo has a long and varied CV in both the private and public spheres. She is on the boards of Engen, Altron, and Sabvest, and holds directorships at Sasol Inzalo Public Funding Limited and Ingwazi Resources. She is also chairperson of Africa International Advisors, Kwanda Private Equity Investments and a director and shareholder of Gidani. Mokhobo has worked with South Africa's Independent Electoral Commission and the UN Special Committee on Women and Economic Development. Qualifications include a BA degree from the University of the North.

MOKWENA MORULANE

CHAIRPERSON

Minergy

www.minergycoal.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'I remain confident that there is a solid base in place from which the company can expand'

MOKWENA Morulane is in the hot seat at Minergy until he finds a replacement for former CEO Morné du Plessis. Du Plessis left in November after a torrid year during which the company plunged into losses when the mining contractor stopped working because it was not being paid. In his 2022 review published in October that year, Du Plessis had given praises for the huge turnaround in Minergy's fortunes because of the then soaring coal price which had taken off following the war in Ukraine. "None of this is possible but through the grace of our loving Father God who continues to bless Minergy," he declared. But the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away (Job 1:21), and by March 2023, Du Plessis had to go on bended knee to a far more secular body for help – the Botswana government – after coal prices plunged a lot sooner than he anticipated. The Botswana government is keen to establish a diversified mining industry to reduce its dependence on diamonds and had bailed out Minergy before. This time around the Minerals Development Company Botswana stumped up 90 million in August and Minergy used the funds to pay the mining contractor Pula. That mining contractor is now being replaced. Minergy's Masama mine had been set up on the basis that it had a competitive edge over South African producers because of its proximity to major coal customers in the west of the country. The company sharply increased output and exported coal through Walvis Bay because of the booming overseas demand that drove up prices but got caught short when that market dried up far sooner than expected.

LIFE OF MOKWENA

Morulane is an accountant with a BAcc (Hons) from the University of Bedfordshire plus he's a graduate of the University of Oxford Executive Leadership Programme. He is the MD of Cresta Marakanelo – a hotel group listed on the Botswana Stock Exchange – but has had extensive experience with Botswana's fledgling mining sector. He was the financial manager at Gem Diamonds Botswana for three years to 2020 and then spent five years with Discovery Metals becoming the country manager for the company. He was the GM corporate services at Botswana Oil from 2015 to 2017 and he joined the board of Minergy in 2017.

PATRICE MOTSEPE

EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON

African Rainbow Minerals

www.arm.co.za

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'The best person for the job is non-negotiable; absolutely, non-negotiable.'

PATRICE Motsepe is closer to the president's ear than any other mining magnate in South Africa. So it is to be hoped that at family get-togethers he uses the opportunity to give his brother-in-law, Cyril Ramaphosa, a tongue-lashing about the electricity, logistics and water supply constraints that are strangling the country's mining industry. ARM has platinum group metal (PGM) operations (heavily reliant on sustainable and affordable electricity for processing) as well as iron ore, manganese and coal mines (all reliant on rail). Ramaphosa's unfortunate selection of Portia Derby, an economist with no logistics experience, as CEO of Transnet, may well have come up for discussion, given the unfolding disaster at the parastatal that prompted her departure from Transnet in September. This may be what Motsepe was thinking of when he said at the 2023 results presentation: "The same principle applies to Eskom and any other parastatal: the principle of employing the best skills and expertise, the best person for the job, is non-negotiable. Absolutely non-negotiable." Although the rest of the mining industry has become more cautious about committing large amounts of capital in this environment, ARM itself has continued to invest in growth and expansion. It spent R7.2bn on capital projects in its 2023 financial year. ARM bought the mothballed Bokoni PGM project from Anglo American Platinum for R3.5bn in 2021 and plans are underway to build a UG2 underground mine at a cost of about R5.3bn. It will complete the Two Rivers Merensky project in its 2025 financial year. In manganese, it recently completed growth projects at Black Rock and Gloria. Whatever Motsepe might think about South Africa's parastatal disasters, the group is showing confidence in the long-term future of the country.

LIFE OF PATRICE

Apart from his LLB degree, Motsepe holds a string of honorary doctorates and likes to be referred to as 'doctor'. He has also received awards for outstanding leadership from bodies as diverse as Harvard University and the World Economic Forum. He practised as a lawyer at Bowmans before moving on to found contract mining company, Future Mining, in 1994. From there he built up a mining empire: first ARMGold and then African Rainbow Minerals. Under the Giving Pledge he committed to giving half of the Motsepe family's wealth to the poor. Some $500m was donated in 2019.

MZILA MTHENJANE

CEO

Minerals Council South Africa

www.mineralscouncil.org.za

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'While we remain positive on recent reform announcements from government to effect change and include private sector participation ... we need far more urgency in dealing with these constraints'

MZILA Mthenjane assumed the helm of South Africa's key mining advocacy body in August 2023. As the former head of stakeholder relations at coal miner Exxaro Resources, his appointment signals the council's improved focus on community relationships. This is a key part of the corporate EESG – economic, environmental, social and governance – agenda. "He is coming in when the focus of all stakeholders in now more on EESG matters, with mining expected to play a significant role in this regard," Minerals Council president Nolitha Fakude said of Mthenjane's appointment. South Africa's mining sector has long been swept by waves of labour and social unrest which are fanned by poverty, unemployment, and rampant criminality. Mthenjane has assumed his new role at a time when the private sector and the government have embarked on a partnership to address three of the major constraints to economic growth of power, logistics and crime. This combination of risk is felt acutely by the mining sector, and Mthenjane is now the face of the mining industry as it confronts these and other challenges. Soft-spoken and unassuming in the typically diplomatic mould of stakeholder relations experts, Mthenjane has maintained a fairly low public profile in his first months on the job as he navigates its terrain. He was highly regarded at Exxaro and is filling the big mining boots worn by previous Minerals Council CEO Roger Baxter, who was a very vocal champion of the sector. We think Mthenjane will be more selective in his public commentary, an in-house approach that may improve government relationship management. But it can cut both ways. Quiet diplomacy can often result in failing to hold the ruling party to broad public accountability.

LIFE OF MZILA

Mthenjane is an engineer with wide experience in finance and stakeholder relations, making him a mining all-rounder. Following a path trodden by many South African mining executives, Mthenjane's education was funded by Anglo American, which gave him a bursary in 1992 to study engineering. He started his mining career as a junior mining engineer at the Elandsrand Gold Mine. He went on to Rand Merchant Bank and Gold Fields, followed by a stint as vice president for Global Corporate Finance at Deutsche Securities. He has also had a senior role at Royal Bafokeng Platinum.

NICO MULLER

CEO

Impala Platinum

www.implats.co.za

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'We have made no secret that battery metals are something of interest to us'

NICO Muller last year won the slugfest against Northam Platinum to take over Royal Bafokeng Platinum (RBPlat), but it's starting to look like a Pyrrhic victory. While the fundamental long-term reasons for the acquisition are sound – RBPlat will greatly extend the economic life of Implats's key Rustenburg operations – in the short term it is going to cost Implats. That's because of the investment that needs to be made into RBPlat which has turned loss-making at a time when the platinum group metals (PGM) market has turned sharply down. Operational performances at RBPlat suffered badly over the past year, which is understandable, and the workforce is unhappy judging by December's sit-in strike, and a stayaway in January. Muller spelt out the short-term priorities at RBPlat as "optimise costs, improve metallurgical performance, complete the Styldrift ramp-up and plan, and implement the medium- and longer-term initiatives to realise the synergies provided by the acquisition". As the Aussies put it, Muller now has to do "the hard yards". (Northam – ironically – seems to have come out of this better overall.) These corporate manoeuvres were put into bitter, tragic context in November when 13 miners lost their lives and 73 were injured following an accident at the firm's Rustenburg 11 Shaft. The accident is a blow to morale as well as production while an independent team runs the forensics over its cause. Longer term, it will be interesting how Muller progresses Implats's longer-term strategy. He has spoken previously of diversifying the company into battery minerals, a strategy that may get an extra push if the PGM markets show signs of permanent structural change amid the adoption of electric vehicles.

LIFE OF NICO

Muller is a mining engineer who first came to prominence during his three-year tenure at Gold Fields' dysfunctional South Deep mine which he restored to profitability on his watch. He left South Deep to become CEO at Implats and, after his departure, South Deep promptly plunged back into the red being saved subsequently mainly by the sustained rise in the gold price. There were plenty of naysayers who doubted he would make the grade at Implats, but Muller has cracked it on all fronts including international acquisitions and – now – a bitter takeover battle.

GARY NAGLE

CEO

Glencore

www.glencore.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We believe the New York market would eat up a standalone coal company very quickly'

LAST year was another busy one for Nagle. After "cleaning house" and dealing with the various investigations against the group in different jurisdictions, he jumped boots and all into M&A activity, with the biggest – and most difficult – deal being the purchase of Canadian group Teck's coal business for $6.93bn. Nagle intends to combine it with Glencore's existing thermal coal business and then demerge and list it separately in about two years' time. Other major deals pulled off last year were the purchase of the 56.25% stake in the copper-gold MARA Project in Argentina that Glencore did not already own, for $475m in cash, and the merger of its 49.99% stake in agribusiness company Viterra with US firm Bunge for $3.1bn in Bunge stock and $1bn in cash. While the MARA deal seems insignificant in comparison with the other two it will require an estimated capital outlay of $6.4bn to build a mine that will produce 200,000 tons of copper annually. The Viterra deal also signalled progress on Nagle's moves to get rid of non-core assets, another being the Mount Isa copper mine in Australia which will close by 2025. The developments with Teck also underscore Nagle's determination to get his way. Glencore's initial "friendly" approach to take over Teck was rejected by the Keevil family which effectively controlled the Teck board and management. Nagle responded with the threat of a direct hostile takeover offer to Teck shareholders while at the same time dealing with Canadian 'anti-Glencore' sentiment on nationalistic grounds. That eventually did the trick. So – by any measure – Nagle's first two years on the job at Glencore have been successful. The Glencore share price has doubled since he took over.

LIFE OF GARY

He's a chartered accountant with degrees in commerce and accounting from the University of the Witwatersrand. He joined Glencore in Switzerland in 2000 as part of the coal development team after qualifying for his CA in 1999. Nagle worked for five years in Colombia as CEO of Prodeco and then moved to South Africa to be head of Glencore's ferroalloy assets from 2013 to 2018. After that he headed up Glencore's Australian coal business and also served on the board of Lonmin from 2013 to 2015. He became CEO in July 2021 after predecessor Ivan Glasenberg retired.

JULY NDLOVU

CEO

Thungela Resources

www.thungela.co.za

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'Even if TFR did not have problems, we would do this because it makes sense from a business perspective'

JULY Ndlovu clearly follows Oliver Cromwell's dictum: "Trust in God and keep your powder dry." Even while he maintained that the mining industry could work with Transnet to fix some of the parastatal's problems, Thungela suspended some of its mining operations in South Africa and diversified into Australia. By June last year, Transnet's annualised exports were down to about 48.5 million tons (Mt) from about 70Mt a few years ago. The chaos at Transnet got progressively worse, rather than better, during the year, to the point where there was a three-month queue of container ships outside the port of Durban by year-end. More and more coal was being trucked to Richards Bay during 2023 because of the poor performance of the rail line, but this caused so much congestion that by November Transnet Ports said it was not going to process any more coal trucks at Richards Bay. Thungela does not truck coal long-distance, but continued to rail as much high-grade coal as prices permitted. It was not enough. In the first part of 2023 it suspended three underground sections and has revised down its guidance on export saleable production for the year by about 1Mt. All this fully justifies Thungela's decision to diversify geographically. In August, it finalised the acquisition of Ensham Resources, an Australian coal producer. Ensham, which cost Thungela R4.1bn to buy, is expected to produce about 2.7Mtpa of export thermal coal at an FOB cost of between \$110 and \$120/t. In South Africa, Thungela has two replacement projects: the R2.4bn Zibulo North, which will extend the life of the Zibulo complex by 10 to 12 years, and another at Elders, which should come on stream in the first half of 2024.

LIFE OF JULY

Ndlovu has headed what was formerly Anglo American SA's thermal coal business (which was separately listed on the JSE in 2021) since September 2016. Before that, he headed Unki Platinum in Zimbabwe (also part of the Anglo group) for over nine years. He also filled various senior managerial positions in Anglo's Zimbabwean businesses in metallurgical operations and technical services. He holds a BSc in Metallurgical Engineering from the University of Zimbabwe, as well as an MBL. His leadership style is described as respectful and fair.

JAN NELSON

CEO

Copper 360

www.copper360.co.za

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We are now putting in a generator farm so that we can overcome the effects of loadshedding'

JAN Nelson – and partner Shirley Hayes – finally listed their junior miner Copper 360 on the JSE in May and, overall, things have gone pretty well for the new company. The listing revealed a key new backer for the fledgling copper producer in the Northern Cape in the form of the Ekapa Consortium which now owns and operates all the former De Beers diamond mines and surface recovery plants around Kimberley. Ekapa will become a 15% shareholder in Copper 360 and Nelson put his head on the block to secure Ekapa's participation. He struck a private agreement to sell Ekapa 10 million of his own Copper 360 shares at a price of 1 cent each if Copper 360 does not meet a guaranteed copper metal production target by end-February 2025. Nelson remains confident he will not have to stump up his shares despite delaying the commissioning date of the new modular flotation plant (MFP1) which had been previously set for end-November. But he is clearly under a lot of pressure to deliver operationally on his forecasts. The MFP1 plant will process sulphide ore from the nearby Rietberg Mine which is the first of several deposits to be mined by Copper 360. Expected production from Rietberg has been increased because of higher grades at the deposit while Copper 360 has also bought the nearby Nama Copper operation for R200m. This gives not only additional copper tailings resources and surface rights, but also a fully operational copper concentrate plant with the capacity to treat 20,000 tons a month of copper sulphide ore. The end result of this – along with unbudgeted capital costs and slower-than-expected cash flow generation from the existing plant treating dump material – was a R274m debt and equity cash raise in December.

LIFE OF JAN

A geologist by profession, Nelson is one of the more colourful characters in South African mining. He came to prominence while running Pan African Resources which he developed from a 'wild cat' exploration outfit into a respectable junior gold miner. Reportedly forced out by BEE partner Shanduka Resources, Nelson took a year off to go surfing, during which he bought a surf shop in Strand. His voicemail message at that time was: "I'm surfing. I will call you back between sets." He got back into junior mining via Colin Bird's Xtract Resources but the two fell out and Nelson eventually found his calling in the Northern Cape.

SIPHO NKOSI

CHAIRPERSON

Talent10 Holdings

www.talent10.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'I don't think red tape will go away, but we will minimise it to make it easier for South Africans to get excited about building businesses'

SIPHO Nkosi's resignation as Sasol chairperson late in 2023 was a setback for the energy company, which is also searching for a successor to the incumbent CEO, Fleetwood Grobler, whose term comes to an end after this year. Nkosi resigned as he was concerned about the perception of a conflict of interest regarding an investment in Kinetiko Energy, an Australian gas explorer based in Perth. Kinetiko received a R75m investment from Talent10, a holding company founded and chaired by Nkosi. Kinetiko focuses on coal bed methane and has a block located on the border of Sasol's Secunda plant. There is the possibility that Kinetiko could in future provide gas to the Secunda plant. In a newspaper editorial, Nkosi was described as a "rare gem" who had steered Sasol successfully through a period of debt reduction and diversification of its portfolio. But Nkosi's relevance extends far beyond his private equity interests: in 2022, he was appointed by President Cyril Ramphosa as head of the government's Red Tape Task Team. Another well-intentioned but ultimately fruitless 'committee' by Rampahosa? Maybe. By Nkosi's own admission, progress has been slow but if there's something South Africa's mining industry needs it's less bureaucracy. Nkosi's job isn't helped by structural deficits: mining industry legislation is unfriendly to entrepreneurs, its lack of a working mining cadastre is disastrous to new investors, and a philosophy stacked against foreign capital is fatal to the sector. Amid these pressures, Nkosi is the best antidote we have: blessed with presence (helped in no small measure by a resounding baritone), he is a critical bridge between the private and public sectors.

LIFE OF SIPHO

Nkosi holds an Honours degree in Economics from Unisa and an MBA from the University of Massachusetts. He has close to four decades' experience on the operational, financial, logistics and marketing side of the extraction and energy sectors in both South Africa and abroad. He was CEO at Exxaro Resources for 10 years, is a former president of the then Chamber of Mines and served on the board of Sanlam. He also chaired the Small Business Institute. In 2019 Nkosi was elected chairperson of Sasol, a position he held until 2023.

JOHAN ODENDAAL

MD

Southern Palladium

www.southernpalladium.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'Pleasingly, the results not only doubled the indicated resource; they were also accompanied by a 5-6% increase in grade'

SOUTHERN Palladium is a rare species on the JSE – it is an exploration stock. What's more it's a platinum group metals (PGM) exploration company pushing ahead with the drilling and assessment of a project at a time when the South African PGM industry is going through the floorboards. The share prices of the major PGM producers have more than halved over the past year and industry talk is of more cost-cutting and closure of non-profitable shafts. Not a good background against which to be talking up an early-stage palladium project which, even if it proves as good as Odendaal and his colleagues are saying, is an estimated 10 years from getting into production. The response from explorers to that is, of course, that by the time their project comes on stream the market will have recovered. For now Southern Palladium is doing what all good exploration firms do which is publish promising-looking drill results and resource estimates as it works through the various stages of exploration and feasibility assessment. There was a setback in May last year when chairperson Terence Goodlace – a former Impala Platinum CEO – resigned owing to a conflict of interest with his other board positions. He was replaced in November by former Minerals Council CEO Roger Baxter who should be able to help with Southern Palladium's mining right application submitted in October. He's had plenty of experience dealing with the South African government's mining bureaucracy. South Africa needs more exploration companies like Southern Palladium, but investors would do well to heed serial developer John Teeling's famous assessment that "high risk high reward means you will lose your money most of the time".

LIFE OF JOHAN

He's a mineral economist holding a BSc degree in geology, a BSc Hons degree in mineral economics, and an MSc degree in mining engineering. He is a director and co-founder of mining and consulting firm Minxcon and his experience includes 19 years as an independent mining consultant and 12 years as a financial analyst. He headed up mining research for South African broking firm Huysamer Stals and spent several years at Merrill Lynch as a vice-president. He was appointed MD of Southern Palladium in May 2022.

TOM PALMER

CEO

Newmont Mining

www.newmont.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We'll look at the portfolio ... and then think carefully about how we might rationalise our portfolio in the next 12 to 24 months'

THE downside of being the world's largest gold producer is replacing reserves, or risk being seen in decline. That's the double-edged sword Newmont CEO Tom Palmer faces daily. Hence the firm's takeover of Australia's Newcrest Mining in November. The transaction, the third-largest in Australian history, establishes Newmont as an 8.5 million ounce a year producer. As is normal given the size of the deal, it presages a bit of portfolio management. Palmer says smaller mines will be sold to recoup $2bn in cash but the group hasn't yet decided which mines it will sell. Might Ghana's Akyem qualify? That could depend on the outcome of exploration to assess potential to extend its current six years of reserves via an extension of an underground decline. There are no such fears for Ghana's Ahafo mining complex, where the monster Ahafo North expansion is expected to add 275,000 to 325,000 oz/year in production from 2025. Palmer describes Ahafo North – which could see total capex of $1.04bn excluding capitalised interest – as "the best unmined gold deposit in West Africa", with "significant potential" to extend beyond its initial 13-year life of mine. Previously, Palmer worried over access to land in Ghana, saying that cooperation with landowners was essential. This remains a present worry. According to reports in Ghana, one local NGO said Newmont must suspend exploration until farmer compensation was finalised. Newmont said in March 2023 it had set aside $14m for resettlement packages. One other noteworthy event: former Anglo American Platinum CEO Natascha Viljoen made the jump from Johannesburg to Denver, US, where she is now Newmont's COO and, quite possibly, its next CEO.

LIFE OF TOM

Palmer is an engineer by profession, holding a Bachelor of Engineering degree and a Master of Engineering Science degree from Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Before joining Newmont, he spent 20 years with Rio Tinto, where he became COO at the group's Pilbara iron ore mines in Western Australia. Prior to that, Palmer held a number of positions with Rio Tinto. He served in various senior vice-president positions after joining Newmont and before being appointed COO in May 2016.

TRISTAN PASCALL

CEO

First Quantum Minerals

www.first-quantum.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'We are focused on Zambia. It is a great place to be'

FIRST Quantum Minerals announced in 2022 it would spend $1.25bn extending its Kansanshi copper project in Zambia. Known as S3 (Solwezi section), the project represented a return of sorts to the country following the investor-hostile administration of former president Edgar Lungu. Lungu's successor Hakainde Hichilema, an economist by training, has sounded far improved investment notes. Now Tristan Pascall wishes the same in Panama where his company has sunk $10bn developing the 350,000-tons-a-year Cobre Panamá copper mine. In mid-December, the South American country deemed the mine's contract to have violated 25 articles of its constitution. It subsequently ordered the immediate closure of the mine spelling major trouble for First Quantum. In January, Pascall set out plans to protect the firm's balance sheet which includes halting the dividend and looking at the sale of smaller mines. However, he remains committed to Zambia — Pascall said in an interview the country was "a great place to be" — while speculation the company may fall to a takeover from Barrick or do a deal with shareholder Jiangxi Copper Corp seems unfounded, at least for now. In a separate development First Quantum agreed to a $200m development of the 30,000-tons-a-year Fishtie copper project in Zambia with local partner Mimosa Resources. Happily for First Quantum, Mimosa will lead the financing, giving it 75% control. In September 2023, First Quantum co-founder and Tristan Pascall's father, Philip Pascall, passed away.

LIFE OF TRISTAN

Pascall joined First Quantum in 2007 and held progressively senior roles in Africa and Latin America until he was appointed director of strategy in 2020. He became COO in 2021, and his appointment to the CEO role was announced following what the company termed a "thorough evaluation", which included a "worldwide external search".

MPHO PHAKEDI

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

National Union of Mineworkers

www.num.org.za

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'It is important that unions are debating and finding common ground with the government and other stakeholders on the Just Energy Transition agenda'

MPHO Phakedi is the highest ranking member of the National Union of Mineworkers since the union suspended its general secretary William Mabapa in July 2023 over alleged mismanagement of funds. But the media-shy Phakedi has hardly stepped forward as the union's public face at a time when it faces mounting challenges, giving the impression that NUM is rudderless. The earthy Mabapa had buried the hatchet with NUM's arch rival the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (Amcu), bringing an end to a turf war that claimed dozens of lives and was marked by flare-ups of labour unrest which unnerved investors. With his departure, the hatchet has been unearthed again. In October and December 2023 Gold One's mining operations east of Johannesburg were the scene of "hostage" dramas, with NUM officials claiming that Amcu members had coerced its members to remain underground in days-long sit-ins. Effectively wildcat strikes, these were triggered by NUM's closed-shop arrangement at Gold One that prevented minority unions from bargaining. NUM's termination of that arrangement did nothing to stop the December incident. Pointedly, NUM – long a key political base for South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) – publicly accused the party's chairperson Gwede Mantashe of "intrusive political mischief" after he said that Mabapa's suspension was "madness". Mantashe is a former leader of NUM and is minerals and energy minister. The public spat pointed to a cooling of relations between the union and the ANC, which could have political implications for the 2024 elections. Having said that, NUM, like Mantashe, is wary of the green energy transition and its implications for coal mining jobs at a time when the union's membership is shrinking.

LIFE OF MPHO

Phakedi is reserved and media-shy, a marked contrast with previous NUM leaders whose ranks have included current South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. This may be a reflection of his working-class roots. He began his career in the mining industry in 1997 as a general worker, with stints at the old Loraine, Winkelhaak, and Venterspost gold mines. He quickly rose to the rank of shop steward in 1998 and has been a regional NUM secretary. Formerly NUM treasurer general, Phakedi was elected as the union's deputy general secretary in 2022.

PHOEVOS POUROULIS

CEO

Tharisa

www.tharisa.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'While current markets are volatile and unpredictable, we believe in the medium-term outlook for PGMs, underpinned by a supply side-constrained economy'

THARISA fared far better than most of its platinum group metal (PGM) peers last year thanks to its chrome production. But it could have been so much better. That's because chrome production from the Tharisa mine in South Africa's North West province was curtailed owing to problems to do with waste removal. It's a pity because chrome prices surged 41% last year. Tharisa's cause wasn't helped by inconsistent PGM feed to its processing plants. As a result, the company has missed its Vision 2020 production targets of 2Mtpa of chrome and 200,000 ounces of PGMs. Pouroulis responded in December with an adjustment to Tharisa's mine plan in which it will start the staged underground development of Tharisa from the mine's west pit. In addition to circumventing the open-pit limitations, related to the nearby community, underground mining will also enable the company to balance its open-pit fleet replacement strategy. In the end, Pouroulis is waiting on a PGM basket price recovery especially as he doesn't want more delays to the firm's 190,000 oz a year Karo Platinum project in Zimbabwe. Tharisa deferred first ore to the mill at the Karo project by 12 months to June 2025, which pushed project returns to 20% from 26% previously. But that return, which reflects a lot of work on bringing down project costs, is still attractive. In many ways, Karo is a dream project: mechanised, open-pit, and with a skilled workforce. The main risks are the undemocratic and rent-seeking government in Zimbabwe and an acute shortage of foreign exchange. However, for foreign investors, this may not be worse than the power, logistics and crime issues that face miners in South Africa.

LIFE OF PHOEVOS

Phoevos has inside experience of the entrepreneurial side of PGM and chrome mining. He is a member of South Africa's legendary Pouroulis mining family, headed by Loucas. Apart from Tharisa, the Pouroulises also had a hand in establishing Petra Diamonds and Keaton Energy, and pulled off a remarkable coup in selling the Eland Platinum mine to Xstrata for about $1bn at the top of the platinum market. Phoevos was involved with Keaton Energy and was commercial director of Chromex Mining. He holds a Bachelor of Science and Business Administration from Boston University.

DANIE PRETORIUS

CEO

Master Drilling

www.masterdrilling.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'Master Drilling is a critical player in the mining industry's transition towards remote mining and mechanisation'

SOUTH African-headquartered Master Drilling is one of the country's technology success stories. Pretorius's focus on diversification has taken the group's home-grown raise boring drilling technology all over the world. This has resulted in a strong performance in the first half of 2023 and hopes of an improved annual dividend. In South Africa, it has two XXXL machines on long-term contract and mobilised a third in the second half of 2023. Operations in Africa include long-term projects in the DRC and Botswana. South American operations have been under pressure. As a key client, Chilean copper producer Codelco had several weeks of operational stoppages. But this was more than offset by work in India, Mexico, Canada and Europe. A recent contract in Saudi Arabia could open up the Middle East region, too. In November, Master Drilling successfully moved one of its drilling rigs to Western Australia, where it will be deployed in underground mining. The beauty of Master Drilling's diversification is that it is not only across geographies, but also currencies, commodities and industries. Pretorius says he is seeing more demand from the infrastructure and hydroelectric sectors. In 2022, Master Drilling bought a controlling stake in A&R Group which provides safety and management solutions for the mining industry. To stay competitive, Master Drilling has to consistently invest in technology, not only in cutting and drilling but also in digital technologies, such as proximity detection solutions and integrated data/resource management systems for mining. In this regard, Master Drilling is a critical player in the mining industry's transition towards remote mining and mechanisation.

LIFE OF DANIE

Pretorius, who founded Master Drilling in 1986 and listed it on the JSE in 2012, is very much a hands-on technical leader. Under his control Master Drilling has developed innovations such as a Mobile Tunnel Borer for use in mining and a mechanised Shaft Boring System that is designed to replace traditional shaft-sinking methods. He is a certified government engineer and is actively involved in special projects such as directional and low-angle drilling and the design and modification of the raise bore fleet. Before founding the group, he worked for AngloGold's Western Deep and Murray and Roberts.

NIËL PRETORIUS

CEO

DRDGold

www.drdgold.co.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

‘The private sector is systematically extending its influence over strategic services and infrastructure and, in so doing, reducing the risk of an absent and incompetent state’

PRETORIUS pulls no punches in his assessment of the South African political, social and business situations and he put the boot in big time at his 2023 interim results presentation. He said: “The state is no longer just a source of drag on the economy – it is in consistent default of its constitutional mandate and has now become a threat to the economy and the quality of life of ordinary South Africans.” Strong stuff, but Pretorius has always stressed the ability of the South African private sector to cope and, in October, he held out the possibility of “the emergence of a younger, externally focused, political leadership eager to collaborate with the private sector and intent on lifting the quality of service delivery”. That political development is not yet obvious, but there’s no denying the impact the private sector is having on the general economy, in particular dealing with Eskom’s power failures. Pretorius reckons there is now an estimated 4.4 gigawatts of installed solar power capacity in the country – the equivalent of two stages of load shedding – thanks to the solar projects built by DRDGold and many other private sector groups. Pretorius has also shed some light on an aspect of DRDGold’s future that many investors are focused on, which is its possible involvement in recovering platinum group metals and chrome from the tailings dumps owned by its major shareholder – Sibanye-Stillwater. He says DRDGold’s team has identified two “very attractive” projects which the company has offered to develop but “execution is not simple”. Pretorius indicates the decision to proceed rests with Sibanye-Stillwater.

LIFE OF NIËL

Pretorius joined DRDGold in 2003 as its legal adviser. He then worked his way up the management ranks to become CEO in January 2009 and has demonstrated an ability to identify strategic opportunities that would help DRDGold’s growth. The most important of these was increasing DRDGold’s minority stake in the Ergo project, established by the late Peter Skeat with backing from Australian junior Mintails. Skeat fell out with his Australian partners and DRDGold steadily built up its stake as Mintails got into financial trouble. Ergo is now DRDGold’s flagship operation.

JACO PRINSLOO

CEO

Sylvania Platinum

www.sylvaniaplatinum.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'The Thaba joint venture combines the strengths and expertise of both companies in the mining and processing industry'

PROBABLY the best measure of Sylvania Platinum's performance has been the way in which the share price held up against the platinum group metals bear market. As of mid-December Sylvania's shares were 32% down from the year's high. Compare that with industry leader Anglo American Platinum – down 42%, and Impala Platinum – down 65%, over the same period. This well-run PGM recovery operation produced 75,469 ounces in the year to June ahead of target and compared with 67,053 oz in financial 2022, and followed that up with a good start to financial year 2024 producing 20,172 oz in the September quarter in line with guidance. But the highlight of the year was the establishment of the Thaba Joint Venture through which Sylvania will process PGM and chrome ores from historical tailings dumps and current arisings from the Limberg Chrome Mine. Sylvania and 50/50 partner Limberg will split the expected revenue from the joint venture's forecast annual production of about 13,000 oz of PGMs and 400,000 tons of metallurgical grade chrome concentrate. For Sylvania its share will increase its annual PGM production by about 9% and allow the company to diversify into chrome. The capital and establishment costs of around R600m will be funded initially by Sylvania from its existing cash and first production is expected in the second half of financial 2025. Prinsloo indicates that Sylvania is still carefully assessing the potential underground Volspruit and Far Northern Limb projects but there are not going to be any swift developments here. A preliminary economic assessment is expected in the third quarter of the current financial year for Volspruit. Whatever the outcome there will be a new chairperson overseeing things with Stuart Murray stepping down in December to be replaced by Eileen Carr.

LIFE OF JACO

He's a metallurgical engineer with a BSc Engineering in Metallurgy from Pretoria University, a postgraduate diploma in business administration and an MBA from the Gordon Institute of Business Science. He joined Sylvania in 2012 initially as executive officer: operations and then became MD of South African operations from March 2014 until appointed CEO in March 2020 when predecessor Terry McConnachie retired. Prior to joining Sylvania, he was principal metallurgist at Anglo American for Anglo Operations Limited and then spent eight years with Anglo American Platinum in various senior metallurgical positions.

IAN PURDY

CEO

Paladin Energy

www.paladinenergy.com.au

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'Paladin is on a clear pathway to becoming a globally significant, independent uranium producer'

PALADIN is like the stock market equivalent of the great love of your life who dumped you but has reappeared on the scene leaving you wondering if you can resume the relationship and restore the magic. That's a tough call to make. This is the stock that went from around zero to A$8 from mid-2004 to mid-2006 the last time the uranium market boomed. It then made it all the way back down to around 2 Australian cents by 2016 as the uranium market went into a long decline and Paladin eventually collapsed, shutting down its mines because of its huge debt burden. The uranium market is now recovering and Paladin shares are back around A$1 with Ian Purdy atop a plan to reopen the Langer Heinrich Mine in Namibia. According to Purdy, the mine should restart production in the first quarter. Meantime, he's playing hardball in price negotiations with customers for its future output. The uranium price registered a 16-year high in November on the back of geopolitical uncertainty and concerns over security of supply along with a resurgence in hopes over the role nuclear could play as baseload power amid the climate crisis. Whatever happened to the once powerful 'greenie' opposition that so hamstrung the nuclear power movement? The talk is now all about future uranium supply deficits with a 'sustained bullish market trend' being predicted. We have heard all that before over the past decade. Maybe this time it is for real, but if you were holding 'worthless' Paladin stock after the debt restructuring maybe it's time to cash in, take the money and run ... assuming you have not already done so.

LIFE OF IAN

He's a chartered accountant with a Bachelor's degree in Business and Commerce from the University of Western Australia. He was appointed CEO of Paladin in 2020 when the company's share price stood around A$0.08 when he was recruited from Quadrant Energy where he was CFO. Quadrant is one of Australia's largest oil and gas companies. Prior to Quadrant Purdy was MD of Mirabela Nickel – an ASX-listed nickel producer operating in Brazil – where he raised more than US$350m in equity and refinanced $450m in legacy debt.

JEFF QUARTERMAINE

CEO

Perseus Mining

www.perseusmining.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We are in an excellent position to either continue to grow our business through organic or inorganic means, or actively return capital to shareholders'

JEFF Quartermaine is a shrewd operator as demonstrated by Perseus's remarkable ascent from small-time player to the 500,000-ounce-a-year cash machine it is today. The success has been based on strong project development and an eye for an acquisition. But Quartermaine's plans were thrown asunder when civil war erupted in Sudan. Perseus had established a presence in the Northeast African country in February 2022 following the A\$230m takeover of Toronto's Orca Gold, the owner of the Meyas Sand Gold Project. By June, Quartermaine advised shareholders that an investment decision on the project had been delayed "for the foreseeable future" notwithstanding some \$300m in credit raised just before hostilities broke out. But you can't keep a good dealmaker down. In November, Perseus took a 19.9% position in Australian firm OreCorp, and in January made a A\$258m all cash bid for the company which is intended to beat an earlier cash and shares offer by rival Silvercorp. This drama is still to be played out but if the chips fall in Quartermaine's favour Perseus will extend its presence to East Africa. OreCorp owns the Nyanzaga Gold Project in Tanzania. Clearly, Quartermaine is opting to put capital into projects, but he also raised shareholder expectations for rewards, saying in October they could expect "a more aggressive approach to capital management". The firm's maiden dividend was in 2021 and it has returned \$100m since, but hopes will be high for a special dividend especially while the gold price is elevated. Elsewhere in the group, Perseus announced the A\$200m underground extension of its Yaouré mine in Côte d'Ivoire. While mining underground is a departure for the group, Quartermaine is confident Perseus has the technical chops to succeed. A lot is at stake: the project will extend Yaouré to 2035 at least.

LIFE OF JEFF

One of the mining sector's more eloquent speakers, Quartermaine has an unusual mix of skills, possessing qualifications in both engineering and accounting. He has been using them for some 25 years at various Toronto- and Australian-listed resource companies. Prior to the Perseus merger with Amara, he was CFO of Perseus from 2010 to 2013, after which he was appointed MD.

ROBINSON RAMAITE

CEO

Salungano Group

www.salunganogroup.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'We are embarking on this journey ... to ensure that Salungano can remain competitive amid, and responsive to, the changing conditions in which our sector is operating'

2023 was a turbulent year for Ramaite's Salungano, formerly known as Wescoal Holdings. Following mass board resignations in July, trading in the company's shares in August was suspended on the JSE after it failed to timeously provide its provisional report for the year to end-March. The company subsequently said this stemmed from "an unforeseen delay in the completion of the audit process". That's a big red flag for investors and a blow to its diversification drive to become a broader energy, minerals, agriculture and logistics investment company. It got worse. On the same day of the JSE suspension, the company informed startled shareholders that its wholly owned subsidiary Wescoal Mining, a coal producer, had taken legal steps to apply for liquidation, prompting Salungano to launch a court application to place it in business rescue. The company's track record on this front is not great. When it successfully applied to have its Arnot coal mine placed in business rescue, shareholders hit back by taking Salungano to arbitration, accusing it of failing to honour its funding obligations. One imbroglio after another certainly raises questions about Ramaite's approach, and it raises pointed questions about the future of a junior mining company that has limited options for raising capital. The JSE has only a handful of listed junior miners, and new listings on the bourse are rare. As the chickens come home to roost at Salungano, its diversification dream is looking more and more like a rotten egg.

LIFE OF ROBINSON

Ramaite was chairperson of Wescoal, stepping in as interim CEO in 2021. He is a politically connected former public servant who is no doubt finding the private sector more demanding. He is a former director-general of the Department of Public Service and Administration. He is also deputy CEO of United Manganese of Kalahari, which is linked to sanctioned Russian oligarch and ANC patron Viktor Vekselberg.

KGOSIENTSHO (SPUTLA) RAMOKGOPA

MINISTER OF ELECTRICITY

South Africa

www.presidency.gov.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'If I had my way, we'd restart the units at Komati. We closed the best-performing power station'

EYEBROWS were raised when, at his State of the Nation address, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced his intention to appoint a minister of electricity. A month later, Kgosientsho 'Sputla' Ramokgopa was appointed to the position, drawing concerns regarding the duplication of roles among ministers. There was already a tug of war between Gwede Mantashe, minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, and Pravin Gordhan, minister of Public Enterprises, who are both responsible for power generation but have failed to solve the country's electricity crisis. Ramokgopa faced headwinds from the get-go. He waited months for a job description from his appointer, reportedly because Mantashe and Gordhan had been trying to undermine Ramokgopa's mandate. When it was eventually finalised, Ramogkopa still didn't have clear performance targets. Despite the appointment of an electricity minister, Gordhan remains responsible for overseeing governance at Eskom, while Mantashe holds the authority to issue tenders and approve contracts for new generation capacity. Ramokgopa hasn't done himself any favours by often making contradictory public statements about energy policy in South Africa. A mere four months into his appointment, he pronounced against government's position on the Just Economic Transition when he declared the decommissioning of the Komati coal-fired power station a mistake. Komati, based in South Africa's Mpumalanga province, was shut down in October 2022 after reaching the end of its life. Ramokgopa said Komati had been the "best-performing" station, generating 1,000MW at the time of its closure. However, energy analysts were quick to point out that Ramokgopa's statements were misleading, and that Komati's contribution had only been 121MW. "What I see are crocodile tears of manufactured outrage by politicians before a looming general election," energy analyst Chris Yelland said.

LIFE OF SPUTLA

Ramokgopa holds a Bachelor's degree in civil engineering from the then University of Durban-Westville and two Master's degrees – one in public administration and one in business leadership. He also has a PhD in public affairs from the University of Pretoria. Ramokgopa was introduced to politics through the South African Student Congress. He was also a member of the ANC Youth League. Prior to his appointment to Cabinet in 2023, he headed the Investment and Infrastructure Office in the Presidency. His nickname 'Sputla' originated from his childhood because of his soccer talent.

TREVOR RAYMOND

CEO

World Platinum Investment Council

www.platinuminvestment.com

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'Currently, platinum's investment appeal lies in its considerable market deficit, but looking ahead, investors will also reap the benefits from a hydrogen-driven demand tailwind'

AT the beginning of 2023 a number of US-based investment gurus reckoned platinum was going to outperform in 2023. It did initially – reaching $1,125/oz in April – but then went into sharp decline to $845 by November. That was despite the prediction from the World Platinum Investment Council (WPIC) that there would be a platinum deficit of just over one million ounces in 2023 followed by a deficit of a further 353,000 oz in 2024. That one million oz deficit is the largest in the history of the metal. The reasons for the deficit, according to Raymond, are ongoing automotive and industrial demand strength coupled with constrained supply. Throw in drops in the prices of palladium and rhodium and you have the reason why major South African platinum groups are looking at shutting down loss-making mines, further reducing supply. Recycling supply has also dropped off sharply because consumers are driving their existing cars for longer. Analyst René Hochreiter is forecasting platinum deficits out to 2035 because of falling South African supply and rising vehicle demand. One of his major themes is that automotive demand is going to remain firm because of huge problems with the planned widespread introduction of electrical vehicles which are already becoming apparent. Then there is the issue of above-ground platinum stocks which built up during the Covid years because of lower vehicle production. Raymond points out those stocks are being reduced because of rising vehicle production meaning "we foresee a return to more typical automaker platinum buying patterns which could further tighten the market and place upward pressure on the platinum price".

LIFE OF TREVOR

Raymond has a degree in electrical engineering from the University of the Witwatersrand as well as an MBA. He spent his early years as a consulting mechanical and electrical engineer with JCI before shifting into corporate finance and mineral economics. He then spent 14 years with Anglo American Platinum, starting off as head of investor relations and ending up as head of market intelligence and market relations before shifting to the WPIC in 2015 as its director of research. He was appointed CEO in October 2022.

BRAD ROGERS

CEO

Jupiter Mines

www.jupitermines.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We aim to be the largest manganese producer globally'

WE said last year that South Africa's manganese sector was worth watching for corporate activity. Sadly, the action didn't materialise, but Brad Rogers at Jupiter Mines, a 49.9% shareholder in the Tshipi manganese ore mine, could yet kickstart it. At the firm's AGM in September he outlined a five-point strategy that had "aggressive" production growth at its heart. He also said "a process" had been started. At 3.5 million tons in manganese ore output a year, Tshipi is the largest of around 10 manganese producers tightly boxed in a 32km stretch of manganese-rich land in the Northern Cape. This concentration makes South Africa the only major manganese-producing country with reserves larger than current production. So with global supply of manganese set to fade, South Africa is ideally placed to grow. But how in a way that best uses limited rail capacity? One pathway is the consolidation of Jupiter Mines with Ntsimbintle Holdings, Tshipi's 50.1% controlling shareholder, controlled by Safika Holdings – a company chaired by Saki Macozoma. Time will tell. What will be clearer this year is Jupiter's plans for battery-grade manganese output following recent success with a bespoke product. The update will provide clarity on the cost and location of a refinery – most likely to be North America or Europe – and the possibility for concentrate production in South Africa. It's a tricky cogitation, however: battery-grade manganese is used in electric vehicles and requires displacement of cobalt and nickel EV battery applications as well as EV demand growth which is hard to forecast. All has to be achieved while sticking to Jupiter's 70% payout policy, navigating logistical challenges, and without losing sight that carbon steel remains the bread and butter for manganese producers.

LIFE OF BRAD

Rogers joined Jupiter Mines in August 2022 following the high-octane ouster of previous management. He is a chartered accountant with experience in engineering and infrastructure. Prior to joining Jupiter Mines, Rogers was at Bis, a mining services company, for about seven years. He also worked at Arthur Andersen and Mainsheet Corporate, a consulting services business. He graduated from Curtin University in Western Australia's Perth.

J PAUL ROLLINSON

CEO

Kinross Gold Corporation

www.kinross.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

A restructure of senior management roles announced last year may indicate CEO J Paul Rollinson's determination to keep Kinross Gold out of the clutches of predators

A RESTRUCTURE of senior management roles announced last year may indicate CEO J Paul Rollinson's determination to keep Kinross Gold out of the clutches of predators. Ever since it was forced to sell its Russian mines in 2022, Kinross has been cited as a takeover target. South Africa's Sibanye-Stillwater is thought to have had an interest in the company. Then, activist shareholder Elliott Investment Management held talks with the company ahead of a $300m buy-back programme. Finally it emerged that Endeavour Mining, the West African gold producer, had discussed a takeover deal. The talks foundered on valuation, which is why Rollinson is possibly so intent on a better rating for Kinross, if only to preserve valuable management time that takeover talks must absorb. The firm's technical skills will be divided between two managers – one to head technical services while another, yet to be appointed, will manage global projects. One of the jewels in the Kinross portfolio is Tasiast mine in Mauritania. An expansion of mill throughput to 24,000 tons a day was finally completed last year, taking annual production to about 600,000 oz. The mine is also testing a recently completed 34MW solar power plant. On the political front, Mauritania was welcomed back into the US-sponsored AGOA pact some 16 years after it was ejected amid a coup. The country also agreed with Chad to leave the G5 Sahel Alliance, created to control the proliferation of jihadist forces. Mauritania has not been drawn significantly into the political foment of many Sahel nations but the alliance, viewed as a construct of the colonising West, infantilised its members, the country stated.

LIFE OF J PAUL

Rollinson is a qualified mining engineer and geologist who ran Deutsche Bank's Americas mining division. He was also deputy head of investment banking at Scotia Capital, and took over Kinross in 2012. He comes from mining stock: his father was a metallurgist and the family consequently lived in Canada's wide-open spaces. Fishing, skiing and boating are among his interests.

NAGUIB SAWIRIS

CHAIRPERSON

La Mancha Resource Capital

www.lamancharesourcecapital.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

‘We are seeing opportunities in a gold mining sector that is fragmented and needs further consolidation’

EGYPTIAN billionaire Sawiris first got into the gold mining business through his investments in Endeavour Mining which he initially helped bankroll and is the largest investor, holding a 19% stake. Endeavour operates in West Africa but the gold mining business seems to be moving a lot closer to Sawiris’s neck of the woods with increasing exploration interest in the Arabian-Nubian shield geological formation which covers parts of Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia. This is being viewed as the ‘next big gold exploration target’. The best description we have seen came from Pan African Resources CEO Cobus Loots who commented: “There’s a crap load of gold. It’s completely underexplored.” But – as anyone with an interest in geopolitics will know – this is a dodgy part of the world to go mining in given the various insurrections and civil wars underway. You can ask Loots again. He had to do a ‘hard extraction’ of his exploration team last year from Sudan when hostilities broke out yet again. Sawiris consolidated all his gold interests from La Mancha Holding into the La Mancha fund in July 2021. As of end-2022 the fund had $1.3bn invested. According to Sawiris this is a “deep-value, long-only fund dedicated primarily to gold mining” which he added “is the natural consequence of what we have been doing since we vended-in our operational assets into Evolution and Endeavour in 2015”. The fund aims to “acquire significant stakes in junior mineral resource companies with strong managerial and geological potential to implement a three- to five-year value creation strategy”.

LIFE OF NAGUIB

According to Forbes he is worth some $3.3bn and is a scion of Egypt’s wealthiest family, with his brother Nassef also being a billionaire. He built his fortunes in telecoms selling Orascom Telecom in 2011 to Russian telecom firm VimpelCom in a multibillion-dollar transaction. He is prepared to speak his mind on key issues such as in 2019 when he ruled out making any investments in Saudi Arabia in the wake of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, commenting: “Why would I go somewhere where I’m not convinced that there is a rule of law and order?”

MICHAEL SCHERB

Founder & CEO

Appian Capital Advisory

www.appiancapitaladvisory.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'If you compare to oil and gas where there are hundreds of private equity funds, there just isn't that number in mining'

MICHAEL Scherb's Appian Capital Advisory burst on to South African screens following a dispute with Sibanye-Stillwater which in 2021 had agreed to buy two Brazilian assets, Serrote and Santa Rita, from Appian only to bail on the deal several months later, citing a geo-technical event. A \$1.2bn suit for compensation brought by Appian is subsequently moving through the UK High Court. But Appian is noteworthy for far happier reasons following an announcement in June last year it had bought a controlling stake in Namibia's historic zinc miner, Rosh Pinah (via Trevali Mining Corp.). Trevali had filed for creditor protection in 2022. Appian plans to restore the 54-year-old mine to its former glory producing 170 million pounds of zinc compared to 700,000 lbs currently. Pleasingly, Appian is retaining the mine's 450-strong staff complement. The investment is potentially one of many African-focused mining investments to come from Appian which, at the time of writing, had an estimated \$3.6bn in assets under management. In September, Scherb appointed Khathutshelo Mapasa, the former CEO of construction group Basil Read, as Appian's Africa head who will lead a concerted push into the continent. Scherb says key target jurisdictions for Appian are Namibia, Botswana and Zambia, as well as "selective jurisdictions" in East and West Africa. Appian had previously invested then sold out of mining properties in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire.

LIFE OF MICHAEL

Born in Taiwan, Scherb became a citizen of the world early in his life after attending schools in seven countries across Asia, Europe and the US. He started work in Beijing structuring foreign debt before joining JPMorgan's metals and mining team in London. He founded Appian at a tender 29 years in 2011, quickly establishing a reach that sees him spend around 200 days per year travelling. Out of work his passion is sport, any sport: hence Scherb is a follower of Cincinnati Bearcats (that's baseball), Ohio State football and, confoundingly, West Ham United. True to his battery minerals interests, he drives a Tesla. He is father to two boys.

NICK SELBY

CEO

Lucapa Diamond Company

www.lucapa.com.au

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'Rather than raise capital to fund the original Merlin development, we will focus on a lower-cost pathway to development using existing resources'

THE slump in diamond prices has been tough on all the sector's miners, but hardest hit are its smaller players. Perth-headquartered Lucapa Diamond Company is no exception. To its credit, however – and that of its now-departed CEO Stephen Wetherall – the company is debt-free. In July, just as Wetherall announced his resignation after nine years at the helm, the company paid a final instalment on A$30m in debt. In addition, the firm's Lesotho-based subsidiary Mothae Diamonds closed R7.3m in debt with the South African government's Industrial Development Corporation. Yet this wasn't enough to save Lucapa's Merlin Diamond Project in Australia, at least not as per a 2022 scoping study that had planned on a A$69m outlay. Selby announced in November the project would be shelved until lower cost options were found. Lucapa paid A$8.6m for Merlin in 2021 with a plan to produce about 2.1 million carats over a 14-year life. It makes perfect sense for Lucapa to tighten its belt while the diamond market finds its feet again. Better, perhaps, to focus on gifts already in hand? Two diamond recoveries within a month at Lulo, one a 235-carat piece and the Angola mine's second largest since opening in 2015, has given Selby encouragement to throw "even more resources" into Lulo's exploration in an effort to "find the primary source". It will be interesting to see whether Selby revisits Wetherall's strategic musings over Lucapa's long-term future which included the question of whether to sell its mines in order to recapitalise (and reinvent) the firm as a 100% focused exploration play.

LIFE OF NICK

Selby is a veteran of the Southern African diamond mining scene having started his working life at SouthernEra Resources before joining Kimberley Diamond Company and Gem Diamonds after that. Lucapa employed him in 2014 as chief operating officer. He was promoted to executive director three years later and then stood in at Lucapa following the departure of Wetherall in July. After a few months, Lucapa's board appointed Selby CEO and that was that for the hands-on Saffer who schooled at Wynberg Boys' before qualifying in extraction metallurgy from Wits Technikon.

ERROL SMART

CEO

Orion Minerals

www.orionminerals.com.au

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We could have got bank finance, but only at an exorbitant rate. Banks only offer money when you've got it'

ORION Minerals' Errol Smart has struggled mightily to resuscitate copper production in South Africa; far harder than you'd expect considering the advantages. For one, there's a massive need for new copper supply in order to satisfy future demand driven by the global energy transition. Secondly, Orion has abundant resources in its flagship Prieska Copper-Zinc and Okiep Copper assets in the Northern Cape. Thirdly, these are former mines requiring less capital than new development would need. But the fact is Orion is yet to produce any metal. It's a source of massive frustration to Smart who cites low risk appetite among commercial banks as one of the factors. In response, he's had to rephase Orion's short-term capital spending plans by adopting a more conservative production profile. This has at least attracted the support of Triple Flag, a Canadian metals streaming and royalty company, as well as South Africa's Industrial Development Corporation. Smart also received a boost when Clover Alloys took a 9% stake in Orion. But in November, Clover declined to exercise additional options in Orion that would have netted it A$73m. All in the life of a minerals exploration and development company, you may say, but this is slow progress for six years' work. So to the future? Production from Okiep Copper is Orion's near-term goal with the Prieska Copper-Zinc mine to follow once it has derisked certain project elements such as dewatering the lower reaches of its mining infrastructure. Orion's vision remains unchanged. And that is to restore the iconic copper assets under its control to production of up to 110,000 tons of copper concentrate a year. Hopefully that can be achieved within the next two years.

LIFE OF ERROL

Smart previously held positions at AngloGold Ashanti, Cluff Mineral Resources, Metallon Corporation, Clarity Minerals LionGold Corp and African Stellar Holdings. He's a geologist by training, with a BSc Hons in economic geology from the University of the Witwatersrand. In addition to his day job at Orion, Smart sits on the board of the Minerals Council South Africa, where he represents the interests of junior miners. That's the result of a commitment to Orion's backers that he would get involved in making the fundamental regulatory changes required to turn South Africa's mining industry around.

MARITZ SMITH

CEO

Alphamin Resources

www.alphaminresources.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'Alphamin's vision is to become one of the world's largest sustainable tin producers'

ALPHAMIN Resources may be registered in the splendour of idyllic Mauritius, but it operates in a far rougher tropical neighbourhood: DRC's North Kivu province. Give Smith his due for running and expanding a mine that currently produces 4% of the world's tin supply in such a volatile region. Take for instance a company announcement in late December that said heavy rains had made already dilapidated roads to its Bisie mine impassable resulting in lower than guided full-year production. But high tin grades certainly help its cause. The Mpama North section of the mine boasts a world-topping tin grade of 4.5% – about four times that of most of its global peers. A focus of Smith and Alphamin currently is to develop the Mpama South deposit, which lies about a kilometre from the centre of Mpama North and will boost combined annual tin production to 20,000 tons from 12,000 tons. The company said in an operational update in October 2023 that the project was "forecast to be substantially completed within the budget of $116m". Given the arduous logistics of operating in eastern DRC at a time of rising costs for mining companies globally, this would be some achievement. In its update, Alphamin said 2,448m of underground development at Mpama South had been completed, with 988m achieved in the third quarter, a 64% quarter-on-quarter improvement. The timely arrival of additional underground equipment boosted the pace. Tin may be associated in the public mind with cans, but it is primarily used for soldering circuit boards. Alphamin believes tin will also be vital for electric vehicles, advanced robotics, and renewable energies.

LIFE OF MARITZ

Smith is a chartered accountant with a BCom Honours degree and has over 20 years' experience in African mining and corporate finance. Alphamin is not the first CEO hat that he has worn. He has also been CEO of Denham Capital's African mining platform Pangea, which is mining entrepreneur Rob Still's operating company. A number cruncher, he was also CFO of Metorex, a mid-tier mining group with operations across Southern Africa back in the day.

RICHARD SPOOR

DIRECTOR

Richard Spoor Inc Attorneys

www.rsinc.co.za

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'We seek justice for those whose work has sent them home bearing the high cost of coal on their bodies'

RICHARD Spoor is at the coal face of efforts to hold South Africa's mining sector accountable for past sins. A human rights lawyer with a passion for justice, Spoor, who spearheaded the R5bn silicosis class action settlement against South Africa's gold sector, has now taken aim at the coal sector. In August 2023 he applied for certification of a class action against South32, BHP Billiton and Seriti Power over occupational lung diseases, in a case initiated by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. When the sacred and the secular join forces in South Africa, things often get done. The class action has since been expanded to include former Anglo American assets such as Thungela Resources and Exxaro Resources. Pneumoconiosis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease are the main illnesses the suit says miners contracted because of their exposure to coal dust. Given the precedent set by the silicosis suit against gold producers – and Spoor has the backing of Motley Rice LLC, one of the largest plaintiffs' litigation firms in the US – Spoor seems to be sowing the seeds of another legal victory. This could have huge implications for the coal sector that is increasingly being starved of capital amid a public backlash at the link between fossil fuels and climate change. That could potentially herald a faster settlement than that obtained against the gold sector, which took several years. Coal mining certainly does not want its reputation tarnished further as it runs out of investment options. So expect Spoor to keep making headlines.

LIFE OF RICHARD

Spoor is a towering figure in South African legal circles, and not just because of his physical height. He has taken on powerful industries such as the gold sector over the incurable lung disease silicosis and done right by his clients. Not one to sit on a point of view he relaxes by flying planes or cycling. In some ways he is a rare breed: he is not anti-business, but social justice is an abiding concern.

JAKOB STAUSHOLM

CEO

Rio Tinto

www.riotinto.com

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'When I started here, I took the annual report and everything was rectangular. I don't like that. Can we have softer lines?'

JAKOB Stausholm has navigated Rio Tinto through some stormy ESG weather. Or as he describes it, a search for "softer lines" after encountering an organisation of hard edges when he first joined. The apologetic public face of Rio Tinto's negligent destruction of the Juukan Gorge caves, sacred to Aboriginal Australians, Stausholm has also acted on a scathing report about corporate bullying which the company commissioned. As the dust settles on these dramas, the Dane is targeting Rio's expansion plans. Rio Tinto said in December 2023 it planned about $10bn a year in capital investments from 2024 to 2026. The focus is on the equity share of the company's much-delayed Simandou iron ore project in Guinea. This has been plagued by legal disputes linked to its layered ownership structure. There has also been an ESG headache stemming from the blasting of a railway tunnel by a Chinese consortium in habitat for a critically endangered chimpanzee species. Simandou is the world's largest high-grade and untapped iron ore deposit and Rio Tinto says it remains on course to tap it. Other projects remain uncertain, including the $463m expansion plan for Richards Bay Minerals (RBM), which mines mineral-rich sands that yield zircon, rutile, iron and slag in South Africa's restive KwaZulu-Natal province. It has been on hold for five years and counting in the face of community unrest and murderous mafias. The criminality that has bedevilled the operation has been reduced, but RBM's bid to make community trust deeds more transparent – a flashpoint for the unrest – is still making its way through the courts.

LIFE OF JAKOB

At a towering 6 ft 7 in, Stausholm is a keen athlete with a passion for cross-country skiing and running. He has a master's degree in economics from the University of Copenhagen. He started work at Shell (even working as a Shell petrol attendant while a student), then Maersk, the shipping company, then Rio Tinto as its CFO. He assumed the top job at Rio in January 2021 after Jean-Sébastien Jacques stepped down the wake of the Juukan Gorge caves debacle. He claims not to be "a born leader".

PETER STEENKAMP

CEO

Harmony Gold

www.harmony.co.za

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'[Mponeng Deeps] is not through the gate yet. But this is an orebody you want to develop'

HARMONY Gold's fortunes were lifted in 2023 by the gold price, which scaled record highs of over $2,100 an ounce as investors sought safe havens in an uncertain global economy riven by rising geopolitical tensions. Combined with a weaker rand currency, this double whammy flowed straight to the bottom line of Harmony Gold's South African mines, which account for about 90% of its production. High grades at its Mponeng and Moab Khotsong operations helped, while Hidden Valley in Papua New Guinea (PNG) also performed well. The company said in November it was confident of hitting full-year production guidance for its 2024 financial year, which ends on June 30, of between 1.38 and 1.48 million oz. The improved revenue line also enabled Harmony to resume the dividend last year despite having R6.5bn in sustaining capex due. For 2024, most of the action will be around resource replacement and growth. Harmony has a brimming pipeline of projects including the expansion of Mponeng Deeps. This will take the world's deepest mine – which extracts gold at depths of up to 3.8km – even further below the surface. We think Steenkamp definitely wants this project but technical and safety challenges, as well as its multibillion-rand price tag, have been pause for thought. A potentially significant delay in the development of the firm's Eva Copper project in Australia, key to Harmony's diversification into copper, could however pave the way for Mponeng. Then there's the longstanding prospect of Wafi-Golpu, an enormous gold/copper project in PNG. The project is back on track following a memorandum of understanding with the PNG government. The takeover of Wafi-Golpu shareholder Newcrest by Newmont means Harmony has a new partner in the project – which could make life interesting.

LIFE OF PETER

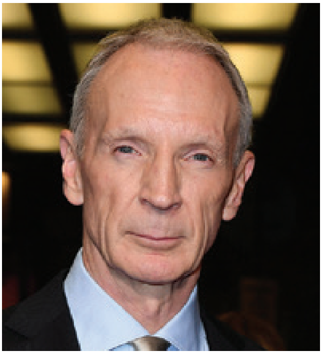
Steenkamp cuts an affable demeanour. He is a mining engineer with over 30 years' experience in the gold and coal sectors. Such technical know-how will be brought to bear on decisions such as the potential expansion at Mponeng. He has also had senior positions at African Rainbow Minerals and Sasol. In a move he no doubt would like to forget about, he was briefly CEO of failed junior miner Pamodzi Gold, which collapsed on his watch. He returned to Harmony as CEO in 2016.

DAVID TAIT

CEO

World Gold Council

www.gold.org



POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'My goal is to marginalise the criminal gangs and get gold into credited refiners and into our ecosystem, and in so doing redirect flows away from nefarious actors'

THIS is a good time to be cheering gold. Geopolitical tensions are giving momentum to bullion while underwhelming global growth and rising debt in the US continue to provide more fundamental support to gold's price. David Tait has certainly ridden this feel-good wave. This is no better illustrated than by the glitzy documentary *Gold: A Journey With Idriss Elba*, which was produced by the council. Tait's success, however, will be truly gauged not by the bright lights but how he's been able to promote gold's prospects beyond the current cycle. He last year announced a strategy to digitise gold trade in such a way that it would be easier – frictionless, he calls it – to be incorporated into the systems of large commercial banks. Before this can truly happen, it's first necessary to improve the provenance of the metal's production. In September, all 33 council members, representing 1,300 tons of annual production, agreed to regularly publish the names and locations of their refining partners. A bar integrity programme is also part of this strategy. In this way artisanal mining, which may account for 30% of all production, can be "dragged into the open", as the UK's *The Times* described it. The council also agreed a plan with central banks of countries battling illegal gold mining to enshrine 12 principles that include stamping out child labour and mercury usage in gold extraction. The banks also agreed to incentivise artisanal miners to sell them their production rather than to criminal gangs. An *Al Jazeera* report last year showing how illegal miners in Zimbabwe landed gold in Dubai's souks via formal institutions in Southern Africa demonstrates the scale of the problem.

LIFE OF DAVID

Prior to joining the World Gold Council in 2018, Tait was global head of fixed macro products at Credit Suisse. He started in banking about 35 years ago at Goldman Sachs before joining Credit Suisse. He is an independent member of the Bank of England's market standards board. Tait is also highly regarded for child protection advocacy work, receiving an MBE for services to the Rebuilding Childhoods Board. Tait has raised a total of £1.5m by summiting Mount Everest on five occasions. A motion picture depicting his life story, Sulphur and White, received a royal world premiere in 2020.

JOHN
TEELING

EXECUTIVE CHAIRPERSON

Botswana Diamonds

www.botswanadiamonds.co.uk

POTSTIRRER

Maverick, opinion-forming thinker

'Recent years have been difficult for junior diamond explorers with little new cash available'

IT seems Teeling – who is a 'doyen' of junior mining developers – may be losing some of his enthusiasm for the industry which would be a pity given his track record and his down-to-earth assessments of the business which investors would do well to listen to. The reasons are his age (he is 77) and, apparently, the attractions of his other non-mining business interests in Ireland. Getting a junior mining project going involves huge commitment over an extended period and it seems at his age Teeling is no longer keen to take the long-term view that is required. If true, then it will be the end of an era because Teeling invented the term 'serial mining entrepreneur' through his involvement with a string of AIM-listed juniors such as African Diamonds, Pan Andean Resources, Minco, African Gold, Persian Gold, Kenmare Resources and West Africa Diamonds. What has endeared Teeling to the investment community is his willingness to tell it like it is about the industry, warning about the very real risks in these ventures. A famous comment of his was: "High risk, high reward means you are going to lose your money most of the time." Teeling slowing down means more responsibility at Botswana Diamonds is going to fall on the capable shoulders of MD James Campbell who partnered with Teeling in his biggest success, which was the development of African Diamonds and its sale to Lucara. Campbell makes no secret of the fact that he would love to get his hands on Gem Diamonds' mothballed Ghaghoo Diamond Mine in Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve. A joint venture to buy the mine fell apart in 2022 because the funding partner pulled out. Campbell's long-term view involves combining Ghaghoo and Botswana Diamonds' own KX36 project which sits nearby.

LIFE OF JOHN

His academic qualifications are top notch with degrees in Economics and Business from University College Dublin as well as an MBA from Wharton and a doctorate in Business Administration from Harvard. He also lectured for 20 years in business and finance at University College Dublin. But it's Teeling's 'real world' qualifications that have made him so successful in the world of junior mining. In particular his gift of the gab has given him the ability to convince a select group of investors to back him time and again.

MIKE TEKE

CEO

Seriti Resources

www.seritiza.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'You can sell your coal assets, dilute your assets ... or do what Seriti is doing – remain a coal miner, but diversify'

MIKE Teke's career has been typified by opportunistic dealmaking in the coal sector. But the industry's horizons are shrinking: while fossil fuels still have a pathway in South Africa's developing economy, the sector is being slowly starved of capital. In response Teke has developed a dual strategy of harvesting Seriti's Eskom and export coal mines while diversifying into green energy assets and halving Seriti's carbon footprint into the bargain. The green energy push is underpinned by Seriti's BEE credentials. The firm is 91% black-owned, which counts for a lot in South Africa. It is also relatively transparent for an unlisted entity, which could help unlock investment doors. Seriti's current project pipeline includes construction of South Africa's largest wind farm in the coal province of Mpumalanga. This follows the signing of a power purchase agreement for 155MW of power to be generated by Seriti Green and wheeled through the national grid to Seriti Resources' coal-mining operations, lending a green hue to its coal production. Power supply from the project is expected to come online in 2025. Teke's approach could be summed up as "diversify or die". Seriti has a significant fixed-contract business with Eskom, South Africa's state-owned power utility, and like the coal it heavily relies on, it also seems to be going the way of the dodo. With massive debt and liquidity problems and a business model that frankly sucks Eskom is hardly a sustainable customer in the long run.

LIFE OF MIKE

Teke has an unusual background for a miner: he's a trained school teacher and a former human resources practitioner. That may explain his professional style: mild-mannered, an excellent delegator, but don't cross him. From classroom to the boardroom, Teke has held posts at Impala Platinum and Billiton before becoming one of the founding shareholders and CEO of Optimum Coal, which was subsequently sold to Glencore. A former president of the Chamber of Mines, he knows many of his peers well and has been a vocal proponent of South Africa's mining industry.

NOMBASA TSENGWA

CEO

Exxaro Resources

www.exxaro.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'I will try my best not to do a deal for the sake of ticking a box'

EXXARO Resources was one of the first of South Africa's coal miners to recognise the investment risks of sticking only to fossil-fuel production. Its Cennergi, a subsidiary, has long been developing renewable power facilities to which Nombasa Tsengwa has since added a focus on power distribution infrastructure. More recently, the company announced a strategy to invest in other battery minerals, including copper. But it has found the going hard: competition for quality resources is global and expensive. Tsengwa has set aside about R12bn for a deal which she is confident will be this year, but in a sign of the difficulties being encountered she has broadened the scope of acquisitions to include a host of other minerals and metals. Shareholders may prefer the cash to be distributed in a dividend rather than suffer the consequences of a panic buy – a worry Tsengwa has sought to assuage. She is also batting back criticism that the firm's renewable energy push with its low capex-low returns approach is inconsistent with the high-return bet of the capital-intensive approach customary to mining. So Tsengwa has it all to prove at a time when capitalising on decent thermal coal pricing is being hindered by the tragi-comedy that is Transnet. Exxaro said in a trading statement there had been no improvement in Transnet's performance last year, when it hit a 30-year low owing to security problems and locomotive shortages. On the legacy front, Exxaro and other South African coal producers face a class action suit spearheaded by human rights lawyer Richard Spoor on behalf of current and former mineworkers who maintain they have contracted coal mine dust lung disease.

LIFE OF NOMBASA

Tsengwa has a PhD in agronomy from the University of Maryland. She has also completed the Executive Development Programme at INSEAD. Long before the term ESG became embedded in corporate discourse, Tsengwa was at the coal face of such issues, having joined Exxaro in 2003 as GM for safety, health and the environment. That's certainly now a sought-after and coveted background. She moved into operational management in 2010 as GM of Exxaro's coal and Mpumalanga operations. Tsengwa was subsequently appointed executive head of coal in 2016.

ANDRIES VAN HEERDEN

CEO

Afrimat

www.afrimat.co.za

RAINMAKER

Making, not stirring pots

'We've done many acquisitions over the years and we know that culture integration is where the biggest risk lies'

IF South Africa's construction sector recovers – and Afrimat's quarterly index reflecting activity across the industry was positive throughout 2023 – Afrimat is among the best-placed to capitalise on it. Currently, about 40% of its revenue is from construction. In the teeth of the multi-year downturn in the sector, Van Heerden has carried on delivering profits. In the past year the construction materials division has done exceptionally well, with better sales to road and rail and, hearteningly, signs of Transnet buying more ballast for rail maintenance. Exposure to construction was increased by buying cement producer Lafarge for $6m. Canny acquisitions to diversify operations are key to Afrimat's success: typically Van Heerden buys small and sometimes ailing operations at a good price, invests in them, and makes them profitable. At Nkomati Anthracite Mine, which previous owner Sentula Mining struggled with, Afrimat has expended capital and effort to bring it up to full capacity. Van Heerden expects it will "come through strongly" in the current financial year. At Glenover, the future materials and metals business, Afrimat is building a beneficiation plant to make high-grade phosphate, and it should start to turn profitable this year. Afrimat is not immune to South Africa's challenging operating environment, but Van Heerden finds solutions: generators have been installed at key industrial minerals operations and some of the iron ore that could not be exported was diverted to the domestic market. Another challenge is finding skills. Van Heerden says the average age of a diesel fitter in South Africa is 57. Afrimat is spending time and effort recruiting young people and training them.

LIFE OF ANDRIES

Andries van Heerden was fired from his job at a quarry company for daring to suggest it was time for sector consolidation. He went ahead on his own, combining two companies, Lancaster Group and Prima Quarries, and listing them on the JSE in 2006 as Afrimat. Since then he has built up the company, one stone at a time. Over the past 10 years the shares have increased sevenfold compared to about 40% for the JSE All-Share Index. Van Heerden is a mechanical engineer with an MBA.

ANTHONY VILJOEN

CEO

Andrada Mining

www.andradamining.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'We are encouraged by the progress towards our strategy of building a large-scale lithium production base'

ANDRADA Mining rebranded in 2022 (formerly AfriTin) because CEO Anthony Viljoen saw an opportunity to turn its Uis mine in Namibia into a polymetallic operation given resources of lithium-bearing pegmatite at the operation. Tantalum resources are also available – a handy credit for those times when the relatively tiny tin market takes a characteristically volatile dip in fortune. Viljoen's hope is that revenue can be doubled with production of the other metals. He is, though, still looking for a strategic, asset-level investor. Plans to attract a partner were announced in the middle of this year but as yet there's been no progress. Discussions continue, the company said at the tail-end of last year. In December, Andrada announced production of a high-grade lithium spodumene concentrate sourced from the Lithium Ridge licence area. At 6.8%, the grade is high. Based on the results, Viljoen said Andrada would proceed with the next phase of exploration drilling, metallurgical test work and mineralogical characterisation. This is planned for the first quarter in order to properly assess the geology, prove the continuity of mineralisation along strike, and to establish a maiden mineral resource estimate – all crucial information for investors. Andrada had a cash balance of $29m at the end of November 2023. The company has also enjoyed organic growth in the first half of its 2024 financial year, driven by a 67% increase in tin concentrate production to 758 tons. Operating in the remote and harsh Namib Desert has its challenges, but the region is mineral-rich and Namibia is seen as a relatively friendly mining investment.

LIFE OF ANTHONY

Viljoen is a mining entrepreneur with over 20 years' experience in Africa. He is a former CEO and founding director of Australian-listed Lemur Resources and successfully co-founded Bushveld Minerals. Viljoen was also a founding member of VM Investment Company. Rocks are in his blood. He hails from a well-known family of geologists: his father is Prof Richard Viljoen and his uncle was the late Prof Morris Viljoen. He holds a Bachelor of Business and Agricultural Economics degree from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and a postgraduate diploma in finance banking and investment management.

NICK VON SCHIRNDING

CHAIRPERSON

Arc Minerals

www.arcminerals.com

FLAG

News is about to happen here

'The deal we have secured is without doubt the best earn-in exploration transaction ever drafted'

AFTER several years of shadow-boxing each other, Arc Minerals and Anglo American finally agreed a joint venture to explore the highly prospective Domes copper resource in northwestern Zambia. Von Schirnding, a former Anglo staffer, could not be more excited about it, declaring his deal with Anglo was nothing short of the best exploration earn-in ever drafted. That would take some doing but in essence it does amount to a sizeable commitment with Anglo pumping $74m into exploration over seven years. It will also pay Arc Minerals $14.5m for 70% ownership of the joint venture company. The first $3.5m tranche to Arc was completed last year and will be followed by $1m payments a year for three years followed by an $8m bullet payment. "The excitement starts now," burred Von Schirnding in an October conference call to investors. Applications for three licences have been made and results ought to start flowing quickly. "We are desperate for the results," he added. The market is watchful, however. Shares in Arc were flat last year although broker WH Ireland said it expected drill results to catalyse the share over time. Von Schirnding's enthusiasm is based on the fact that the Domes prospect is near three major copper mines in First Quantum's Sentinel and Kansanshi operations and Lumwana, Barrick's copper/gold mine. Zambia was once the stamping ground of Anglo's copper production so its return is significant. Arc is hoping to progress another copper discovery in Sub-Saharan Africa's newest copperbelt in Botswana. There's a project in Namibia that has also caught the eye.

LIFE OF NICK

After graduating from the University of Cape Town with a law degree, Von Schirnding joined Anglo American where he spent 19 years including two at De Beers, four years at Minorco, and 11 years at its investor relations which he headed. Since then Von Schirnding has held down various positions as director, CEO and chair of several mining companies including Arc, which he chairs, and Ortec. He is also consultant to Apollo Global Management.

DUNCAN WANBLAD

CEO

Anglo American Corporation

www.angloamerican.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'If you are managing a portfolio like we are, there are clearly no sacred cows in it'

"UNEASY lies the head that wears a crown," wrote William Shakespeare, and that sentiment must resonate with Wanblad, who has had a rough start to his tenure. It was tough enough taking over from highly successful predecessor Mark Cutifani, but Wanblad's appointment has coincided with a downturn in commodity markets and the emergence of some significant issues within the Anglo empire. Using the measure that resonates most with the ordinary shareholder – the share price – Anglo last year dropped 47% from around R760 in January to as low as around R400. A big chunk of that drop came in December when Anglo announced large cuts in its forecast copper production in 2024 and 2025 in addition to depressed conditions for its diamond and platinum operations. Wanblad said De Beers would make losses in the second half of the 2023 financial year after diamond sales collapsed although he reckoned there would be a "bounce back" in demand during 2024. Still to be quantified is the financial impact of the new marketing agreement between De Beers and the Botswana government. Analysts also remain uncomfortable with Anglo's Woodsmith mineral fertiliser project which will cost around \$4.8bn and which Anglo has already impaired by \$1.7bn. In a nutshell, "Anglo loves this project but the market hates it," according to Bank of America analysts. They want Anglo to bring in a partner to share the capital cost. Wanblad says Anglo will do so but "at the right time and for value". Recent speculation is that will happen sooner rather than later. Broadly speaking, Wanblad may find consolation in the fact Cutifani had a rough start at Anglo as well until the markets swung back in his favour.

LIFE OF DUNCAN

He's a mechanical engineer who began his career at the former JCI in 1990 where his father – Graham – worked. He held a number of positions moving up in the management hierarchy and particularly in platinum which, in those days, Anglo controlled through JCI. Wanblad joined the Anglo Platinum (Amplats) board in 2004 and served as executive director of projects and engineering until 2007 when he was briefly appointed joint interim CEO at Amplats. He was appointed head of Anglo's copper operations in 2008 and CEO of the whole bang shoot in 2022.

NOMPUMELELO ZIKALALA

CEO

Kumba Iron Ore

www.angloamericankumba.com

HOT SEAT

Bottom-singeing pressure

'Ongoing logistics constraints have continued to place significant pressure on our value chain, resulting in stock levels increasing to unsustainable levels'

A CHEMICAL engineer by training, 'Mpumi' Zikalala probably never anticipated that she would need to apply her brains to trains. Like Kumba's peers in the coal sector, its plans have been derailed by the snafu at South Africa's state-run logistics company Transnet. The Anglo American unit extracts iron ore from the ochre sands of the arid Northern Cape province. This product needs to be delivered to port for export via a collapsing rail service that is short on locomotives and prey to criminal syndicates who steal copper cables for resale. In December 2023, Zikalala said stock had reached "unsustainable levels", forcing Kumba to curtail any production growth for at least two years and making it harder to counter mining inflation. Earlier in the year, the group's 70% shareholder, Anglo American, said new growth projects would be held in abeyance until export volumes revived. The outcome is that Kumba's short- and long-term ability to capitalise on iron ore markets has been stymied by Transnet. No wonder Anglo CEO Duncan Wanblad heavily criticised government at the Mining Indaba in 2023. It's also worth keeping an eye on discussions said to have occurred between Anglo and government on possible job cuts at Kumba. On the upside, Zikalala will be hoping to get approval for the redesign of the firm's ultra-high dense media separation plant. The project, which was sent back by Anglo for review nearly two years ago, will be submitted for board approval this year. It's a priority project for Zikalala as it will help improve yield, which will in turn help keep costs under control. In lieu of having influence over volumes (not to mention the iron ore price) this could be important for Kumba's sustainability.

LIFE OF NOMPUMELELO

Zikalala holds a BSc in chemical engineering from the University of the Witwatersrand and completed leadership development at the London Business School. Appointed Kumba CEO in January 2022, she has spent over two decades in the Anglo American trenches. A De Beers Group bursar, she joined the diamond producer in 2001 as a process engineer. Zikalala became the first female general manager at the De Beers Group in 2007, eventually rising to the position of managing director, De Beers Group Managed Operations, in April 2019.