

Business

Global mining industry seeks to polish tarnished reputation

Wildcat miners, including children, risking lives to unearth metals, minerals

LONDON: The global mining industry is increasingly showing a commitment towards greater respect for human rights and the environment, but is accused of wanting to improve its reputation without seeking real progress. Wildcat miners, including children, are risking their lives daily to unearth metals and minerals they sell to mining companies. In return, they earn a subsistence wage but not the working rights of a legal and salaried mining group employee.

"While industry initiatives on certain minerals and metals are helpful, companies are still responsible for undertaking comprehensive human rights due diligence across all minerals and metals in their supply chains," Eniko Horvath, senior researcher at the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre (BHRRC), told AFP.

In June, dozens of illegal miners died when part of a copper mine collapsed in southeastern DR Congo. The mine was in the Kolwezi area operated by Kamoto Copper Company, a subsidiary of the Swiss giant Glencore. Meanwhile at the start of the year, a dam collapse at a mine operated by Brazilian group Vale unleashed a tsunami of mud that killed more than 200 people while around 100 more went missing.

China, also the scene of fatal mining accidents, has additionally been in the spotlight for its dumping of toxic waste in Baotou, Inner Mongolia, as Beijing drives global production of rare earth elements used in key technologies such as smartphones. Faced with rising criticism, the mining industry says it wants to adopt standards of good governance. The London Metal Exchange, the global center for trading in industrial metals, recently adopted new ethical standards to ensure better traceability of raw materials, especially those most at risk such as cobalt used heavily in high-end technology.

"As metals play an increasingly important role in society with increased focus on ethical supply chains,

the LME's role and responsibility is vital," the exchange's incoming and first female chair Gay Huey Evans said on her appointment. Earlier this month, the World Gold Council (WGC) issued "Responsible Gold Mining Principles", although the guidance is non-binding.

The industry body calls upon its members to "respect the human rights" of workers and communities affected by mining activities. "We will work to ensure that fragile ecosystems, critical habitats and endangered species are protected from damage and we will plan for responsible mine closure," according to another directive.

A spokesman for Barrick Gold, the world's largest producer of the precious metal, told AFP that the group was already meeting or exceeding the new WGC guidance, while Glencore has laid out a similar charter to that provided by the World Gold Council. Elsewhere, BMW along with German chemical giant BASF and Samsung last week announced a joint project to ensure "responsible" cobalt mining in DR Congo. "It's great to see these statements of purpose and expressions of a willingness to meet these standards, but they have to be matched with action," Amnesty International official Lucy Graham told AFP.

"What we really want to see is laws that are going to legally require industry to mine minerals responsibly and transparently."

'PR whitewash'

Jamie Kneen, from MiningWatch Canada, said he believed companies and industry bodies were simply providing "yet another effort at PR whitewash". He added: "The standards that they are incorporating are... self-administered and audited by unaccountable third parties; and they are explicitly focused on providing confidence to investors and buyers with not even a



BRUMADINHO, MINAS GERAIS, Brazil: In this file photo, a sniffer dog locates body parts as emergency crews continue the slow process of picking through the mud looking for bodies, 99 days after the collapse of the Corrego do Feijao dam of mining company Vale in Brumadinho, Minas Gerais State, Brazil. —AFP

mention of host or affected communities." Kneen said there was a need for "enforceable... legal and regulatory standards at all levels". To help companies face their responsibilities, human rights group BHRRC has this month launched a dedicated website, the Transition Minerals Tracker.

It "seeks to improve the human rights practices of companies that produce the minerals vital to the renewable energy and electric vehicles sectors, by shedding light on the key human rights risks in the geographies where they operate", noted Horvath. —AFP

Sun-seekers feel the strain of Thomas Cook crisis

LONDON: The possible collapse of Thomas Cook has "ruined" the holidays of thousands of tourists, who fear being trapped far from home despite official reassurances that they will be looked after.

Some 600,000 holidaymakers are currently abroad on trips organised by Thomas Cook, including 150,000 British tourists. The mass travel pioneer is mainly active in Europe and around the Mediterranean, with Antalya in Turkey and Mallorca in Spain its flagship destinations. Jackie and Amy Ward, a mother and daughter on holiday in Mallorca, told Britain's Sky News that their holidays in the sun had been "ruined" by uncertainty over their return. Jackie Ward said that she had heart disease and would run out of medicine if she did not return home on Monday, as planned.

A stranger had offered to buy a ticket for the Newcastle tourist to ensure that she could return safely if the firm collapsed, Sky News reported. Thomas Cook's hundreds of service providers were also wracked with anxiety over the company's troubles, with some facing

closure themselves if the tour operator goes under.

Managers of the hotel Les Orangers in Hammamet, Tunisia, briefly delayed the departure of a group of tourists until they could verify that payments owed by Thomas Cook had been made, a Tunisian interior ministry spokesman told AFP. The resort managers requested additional payments even though the group had already paid the costs of their stay in full, a tourist told AFP.

"After an hour they left the hotel and are currently at the airport," said the government spokesman.

"There are other Thomas Cook groups in Hammamet, Sousse, Mahdia and Djerba — all payment procedures have been settled," he added.

Plans dashed

In addition to travellers worried about their return, others are concerned that their much-anticipated holiday plans are about to collapse. Briton Chloe Hardy told the BBC that she was scheduled to fly to Greece on Thursday to get married on a Thomas Cook trip she booked more than a year ago. "Our wedding is costing almost £12,000 with things we have bought here, the wedding package, everything we have organised with the resort wedding coordinator," she said. "We've had constant questions from our family that we are unable to answer," she added. "This is causing great concern, worry and stress to all of us involved."

Others poured out their frustrations



HAMMAMET: British tourists walk outside the Orange Beach hotel in Tunisia's coastal town of Hammamet yesterday. Thomas Cook's 178-year existence was hanging by a thread on Sunday after the iconic British travel firm struggled to find further private investment and is now relying on an unlikely government bailout. —AFP

on Twitter. "I'm supposed to fly on Tuesday and would really appreciate some info," complained @JoshSmith1990. "Very stressful flying out on 15 October for a wedding spent almost 2 years paying for the holiday will be so gutted if we can't go please someone help them," added @bullyforyou180. British authorities sought to reassure travellers, saying that all tour packages purchased in Britain and the European Union were protected by law.

In Britain, the "ATOL guarantee" covers repatriation and refunds for holiday-

makers if the company goes bust, with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) responsible for getting them home.

The CAA has got experience, orchestrating the repatriation of some 85,000 people following the bankruptcy of the British airline Monarch two years ago, but the collapse of Thomas Cook would be of a completely different magnitude. The crisis comes six months after thousands of travellers were left stranded in Europe and the United States by collapse of Icelandic low-cost airline Wow. —AFP

Burgan Bank announces winners of Yawmi account draw

KUWAIT: Burgan Bank announced yesterday the names of the daily draw winners of its Yawmi account draw, each taking home a cash-prize of KD 5,000.

The lucky winners are:

1. Anwar Abdulkareem Altaher
2. Abrar Mohsen Eissa
3. Sameh Talaat Bader Mohamed
4. Saeed Subhi Jerjes
5. Mariam Saad Lilo Alsaraji

In addition to the daily draw, Burgan Bank also offers a quarterly draw with more chances to win higher rewards, offering the chance to one lucky customer to win KD 125,000 every three months. The Yawmi Account offers daily and quarterly draws, wherein the quarterly draw requires customers to maintain a minimum amount of KD 500 in their account for two months prior to the draw date. Additionally, every KD 10 in the account will entitle customers to one chance of winning. If the account balance is KD 500 and above, the account holder will be qualified for both the quarterly and daily draws.

Burgan Bank encourages everyone to open a Yawmi account and/or increase their deposit to maximize their chances of becoming a winner. The higher the level of the deposit, the higher the likelihood to win.

Deutsche Bahn sees big windfall from climate change package

BERLIN: Germany's Deutsche Bahn expects the government's 50 billion euro climate change package to generate the railway company's biggest growth spurt in its 180-year history, the state-owned firm's boss said yesterday. In a telephone press conference, Richard Lutz said the measures announced on Friday, including a cut in value-added tax (VAT) on train tickets, would give it an additional 20 billion euros in revenue by 2030.

Although the package, in response to growing public concern about the impact of climate change, disappointed climate activists, individual measures such as surcharges on domestic flights and the VAT

Thousands of Swiss protest 5G wireless over health fears

BERN: Thousands of people protested in the Swiss capital Bern Saturday over the roll-out of a 5G wireless technology across the country, which they fear could damage people's health.

The protesters, many carrying placards, gathered in front of the Swiss parliament building, in a bid to stop

cut are expected to have an impact on the companies concerned.

"We are now on the attack and rebuilding," he said. Europe's railway companies are expected to be major beneficiaries of a shift away from car and air transport towards public transportation offerings that emit proportionally less carbon. The company planned to buy 30 new high-speed trains by 2023 to cater for the expected growth in passenger numbers, a one billion euro bonanza for train-building companies. The railway's current ICE-4 trains are built by Siemens and Bombardier, but Lutz said the new units would not be of the same type. France's Alstom is another potential supplier.

Financially strained Deutsche Bahn, which has been under fire over delays and for having insufficient capacity, said it would invest 11 billion euros of the extra cash in recapitalising. Despite running at a profit, the company has had to take on extra debt to finance investment.

Deutsche Bahn operates Europe's largest railway by track length, though at 39,000 km it is far shorter than at its peak length of 58,000 km. —Reuters

the construction of more 5G-compatible antennae. "The fact that so many people turned out today is a strong sign against the uncontrolled introduction of 5G," said Tamlin Schibler Ulmann, co-president of Frequencia, the group that organized the rally. The tiny principality of Monaco became the first country in Europe to inaugurate a 5G mobile phone network in July based on technology from Chinese firm Huawei, which is seen by the US as a major security risk.

But critics in Switzerland argue that the electromagnetic radiation the new system emits poses unprecedented health and environmental risks compared to previous generations of mobile technology. Online petitions have helped persuade several Swiss cantons—in Geneva, Vaud, Fribourg and Neuchâtel—to postpone the construction of antennae as a precaution. —AFP

Airbus irked by Spain's choice of fighter jet partner

MADRID: Airbus has sharply criticized Madrid for choosing defense systems specialist Indra to coordinate Spain's participation in a Franco-German project to develop a new-generation fighter jet, in which the aviation giant is deeply involved. The decision, which was taken by the defense ministry in late August, saw Indra chosen to coordinate Spain's work on a stealth fighter whose development is being led by Airbus and France's Dassault Aviation.

Airbus chief executive Guillaume Faury told online business journal El Confidencial the group "didn't see the decision coming" as it was expected to be selected. He said that Indra was a sensors and equipment producer but had no capabilities in air-planes, drones nor satellites.

"You don't want someone who makes wheels or computers designing your car. You want a carmaker," he told El Confidencial on a visit to Spain to convince the government to rethink its decision.

Indra is a Spanish technology and defense group which had sales of 3 billion euros (\$3.3 billion) in 2018. Airbus group sales in the same year totalled 63.7 billion.

The ambitious Future Combat Air System (FCAS) project will combine a new generation fighter plane with drones, satellites and other aircraft to help reduce the EU's long reliance on US planes and equipment. It aims to have the new plane operational by 2040, when it will replace the current generation of Rafale and Eurofighter jets.

Speaking to El Confidencial at the start of his visit, Faury said it was "difficult to imagine" anyone coming in for the design phase who didn't have the same expertise as Airbus "in planes, drones or satellites, but only in systems and sensors". But in a separate interview with El Confidencial on the same day, Defence Minister Angel Olivares showed no willingness to reverse the decision.

"This is not a circumstantial decision, which can be changed overnight. We have decided on Indra, and we will continue to insist that they work together with Airbus and the rest of the industry."

He also expressed the government's frustration at its weakening influence within the Airbus Group, in which it holds a four percent stake, compared with the 12 percent held by France and by Germany.

"The relative importance of Spain within Airbus is shrinking," he said. "In the latest restructuring, Airbus Spain's management no longer has an active role on the executive committee of the Group, for the first time." Since 2015, Spain's representative on the board of directors has been chosen by Airbus itself, against the wishes of the Spanish government. —AFP



The combat fighter is to go into service in 2040