

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF AFGHANISTAN

By Chin S. Kuo¹

In 1994, the Civil War situation in Afghanistan had dramatically worsened and the country's economy was devastated. The massive destruction of roads, bridges, schools, clinics, and much else was seemingly without end as fighting between faction leaders intensified. The Afghan transit trade was one of the world's largest smuggling practices. The economic disintegration of Afghanistan and a growing hunger for consumer goods throughout Central Asia made smuggling an operation for huge profits. From Quetta, Pakistan, traders delivered electronics, rice, and household goods to the Iranian cities of Zahedan and Zabol and returned with gasoline and diesel fuel. Other traders carried foodstuffs and consumer goods to Turkmenistan via Herat and came back with gasoline. From Peshawar, Pakistan, they smuggled goods via Kabul to Tirmiz on the Uzbekistan border.

Afghanistan is a land-locked country and has never been a significant producer of any mineral commodity. During Soviet occupation, some mineral deposits were discovered: asbestos, mica, and sulfur near Maimana; beryl in the Kunar Valley; gold and silver in the Panjshir

Valley; lapis lazuli in Badakhshan; and uranium in the Khwaja Rawash mountains. There are occurrences of high-grade chrome ore in the Logar Valley near Herat. Good-quality deposits of iron ore are in the Hajigak hills in Bamyan Province.

The country's coal reserves are large, in the region between Herat and Badakhshan in the north. Bituminous coal was mined at Karkar in Pule-e-Khumri, Ishpushta near Doshi, and Dar-e-Suf north of Mazar. Production capacity was small at about 180,000 metric tons per year. Czech mining equipment was being used to extract coal in the northern mines.

Natural gas was produced from the gasfields in the Sheberghan and Sar-i-Pol areas in the amount of 2.4 billion cubic meters per year. It was used to operate a 34-megawatt generator at Mazar-e-Sharif. It also was used for fertilizer production of high-grade urea at Mazar-e-Sharif. Natural gas became an important export commodity to neighboring Uzbekistan along with urea fertilizer.

¹Text prepared Aug. 1995.

TABLE 1
AFGHANISTAN: ESTIMATED PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES 1/ 2/

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity 3/	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Barite	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Cement, hydraulic	112,000	112,000	115,000	115,000	115,000
Coal, bituminous	180,000	170,000	175,000	180,000	180,000
Copper: Mine output, Cu content	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Gas, natural:					
Gross	2,400	2,500	2,600	2,700	2,700
Marketed	2,100	2,200	2,300	2,300	2,300
Gypsum	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Natural gas liquids	30	35	35	35	40
Nitrogen: N content of ammonia	40,000	40,000	40,000	30,000	30,000
Salt, rock	10,000	12,000	12,000	13,000	13,000

1/ Data are rounded to three significant digits.

2/ Table includes data available through Aug. 31, 1995.

3/ In addition to the commodities listed, asbestos, lapis lazuli, uranium, and a variety of crude construction materials (clays, stone, and sand and gravel) presumably are produced, but available information is inadequate to make reliable estimates of output levels.