

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF AFGHANISTAN

By Chin S. Kuo

Factional fighting around the capital city of Kabul temporarily stopped for 4 months in 1995 after 4 years of civil war. Since the mujahideen ousted the communist regime of President Najibullah in 1992, the city had been devastated by daily bombardments, and it required \$65 million¹ to rehabilitate Kabul's electricity supply. The country's already weak infrastructure had been mostly ruined, particularly power generation and transportation, and economic development had been reduced to a minimum.

Iran was providing fuel and other assistance. About 30 United Nations and other international aid agencies were clearing the rubble, helping to reopen schools, setting up subsidized bakeries, installing water pumps, and providing materials so that homes could be rebuilt. But funds were scarce, and the international donors were not willing to commit to large-scale aid until the Afghans agreed to peace.

Afghanistan exported natural gas, precious and semiprecious gems and imported consumer goods, foodstuff, and petroleum products. Natural gas was the only economically important output. It was produced from Shiberghan and Sar-i-Pol and used for producing fertilizer and for generating electricity at Mazar-e-Sharif. Annual output was around 2.4 billion cubic meters. Natural gas was exported to Uzbekistan by pipeline. Lapis lazuli, though best known for the country, was of less significance.

Other mineral resources known to have been found in the

country included barite, coal, copper, iron ore, lead, petroleum, precious and semiprecious stones, salt, sulfur, talc, and zinc. Coal deposits occur mostly in the north from Herat to Badakshan. Rich reserves of iron ore were discovered years ago at the Hajigak hills in Bamyan Province.

Afghanistan has never been a significant producer of any mineral commodity. Mineral development had been severely hampered by then insurgent warfare and now civil fighting. A cement plant was in operation with a capacity of 115,000 metric tons per year (t/yr). Copper was produced at Ainak at a level well below capacity. Coal output was around 300,000 t/yr. (*See table 1.*)

¹Where necessary, values have been converted from Afghan afghanis (Af) to U.S. dollars at the rate of Af1,900=US\$1.00 for 1995.

Major Sources of Information

Ministry of Mines and Industries
Kabul, Afghanistan
Ministry of Water and Electricity
Kabul, Afghanistan

TABLE 1
AFGHANISTAN: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES e/ 1/

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity 2/	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	
Barite	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	
Cement, hydraulic	112,000	115,000	115,000	115,000	115,000	
Coal, bituminous	170,000	175,000	180,000	180,000	185,000	
Copper, mine output, Cu content	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	
Gas, natural:						
Gross	million cubic meters	2,500	2,600	2,700	2,700	2,600
Marketed	do.	2,200	2,300	2,300	2,300	2,200
Gypsum		3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Natural gas liquids	thousand 42-gallon barrels	35	35	35	40	40
Nitrogen, N content of ammonia		40,000	40,000	30,000	30,000	30,000
Salt, rock		12,000	12,000	13,000	13,000	13,000

e/ Estimated.

1/ Table includes data available through Aug. 21, 1996.

2/ 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.