

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF AFGHANISTAN

By Travis Q. Lyday

The landlocked Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is an extremely poor country with rugged terrain and a seasonally harsh climate. It encompasses approximately 647,500 square kilometers. For almost one-quarter of a century, the country has endured extreme political upheaval, civil strife, and outright war, including U.S. military involvement since 2001. Most of the major administrative, agricultural, communication, education, Government, heavy- and small-scale industries, social services, and transportation systems were seriously damaged or utterly destroyed. An estimated 4 million to 5 million of the 29 million population was displaced within and outside the country. Additionally, natural catastrophes, such as drought and earthquakes, have afflicted the country in the past few years.

The country, however, has economic potential owing to mineral resources that range from exotic minerals, such as

lapis lazuli and other fine gems for which Afghanistan has been an important source for many centuries, to more-standard ore deposits, such as copper, gold, and iron ore. Precious and semiprecious stone deposits are numerous. Some of the main gemstones that were produced in 2003 were aquamarine, emerald, kunzite, lapis lazuli, ruby, and tourmaline, most of which were exported to Pakistan. Additional mineral resources include barite, coal, chromite, lead, salt, sulfur, talc, and zinc, as well as natural gas and petroleum. Some of these resources were exploited in the past, and others were not. The country has limited resources under production and generally lacks the infrastructure to use them.

More-extensive coverage of the mineral industry of Afghanistan can be found in the 2002 U.S. Geological Survey Minerals Yearbook 2002, volume III, Area Reports—International—Asia and the Pacific.

TABLE 1
AFGHANISTAN: ESTIMATED PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES^{1,2}

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Barite	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Cement, hydraulic	120,000	120,000	120,000	120,000	120,000
Coal, bituminous	190,000	190,000	190,000 ^r	185,000	185,000
Copper, mine output, Cu content	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Gas, natural:					
Gross	million cubic meters	2,600 ^r	3,000	3,000	3,000
Marketed	do.	2,200 ^r	2,500	2,500	2,500
Gypsum		3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000
Natural gas liquids	thousand 42-gallon barrels	40 ^r	45	45	45
Nitrogen, N content of ammonia		5,000	5,000	5,000	5,000
Salt, rock		13,000	13,000	13,000	13,000

^rRevised.

¹Table includes data available through October 1, 2004.

²Estimated data are rounded to no more than three significant digits.