

## Afghanistan Geological Survey (AGS):

Since ancient times, Afghanistan has been known as a source of precious and semi-precious stones, such as spinel and lapis that were mined in the mountains of Badakhshan. These gemstones have been referenced for centuries in travel manuscripts and ancient Persian poems. Some of the earliest indications of mining, anywhere in the world, come from Afghanistan and date back 6,000 years.

Despite its strategic location as a pathway to the historic trade routes and its importance as a source of gemstones, relatively little is known about the exact location of ancient mines, as few formal written records exist. An example of this is the recently discovered mining and copper smelting evidence at Mes Aynak in Logar province.

It was not until the 19th century that systematic attempts were made to assess the mineral resources of the region, initially by British military expeditions which were followed by surveys conducted under the auspices of the Geological Survey of India.

From that point onwards, various geological expeditions investigated areas generally located along the Silk Road. These studies laid the foundations of the industry's present day knowledge of Afghanistan's geology.

A new era in the study of Afghanistan's geology and mineral resources began when the Government of Afghanistan inaugurated the National Geological Survey in July 1955. This marked the initiation of organized surveys of the geological and mineral resources of this country, which continued through the next 25 years. This period was characterized by extensive mapping operations and, subsequently, by geological surveys and the prospecting of mineral occurrences and a more detailed evaluation of selected prospects.

The Afghanistan Geological Survey (AGS) under the Ministry of Mines and Industries conducted this work in cooperation with German, Italian, French and Soviet geologists, as well as nominal support from the United Nations.

German, Italian and French geological missions were present in Afghanistan between 1959 and 1967. Their assistance helped in the creation of maps and documentation of mineral deposits working in parallel with existing Soviet interests, who finalized and published a compendium of international studies. This eventually led to the establishment of the Department of Geology and Mines and later the Department of Geological and Mineral Survey.

This period represented the most important phase of mineral exploration to date; and resulted in the production of a large number of reports and materials on mineral occurrences, resources and prospects.

Geological investigations were severely curtailed with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, in December 1979, when the country effectively became closed to western geologists. Prior to the invasion, the geology of Afghanistan was probably known in more detail than any other region of the Himalayas; however, this very much marked the suspension of outside interests and the isolation of the Afghan geological community.

Like other government institutions, the Afghanistan Geological Survey was severely weakened during more than two decades of military conflict, and suffered from a lack of investment or skills development, and a specific inability to perform on any active projects.

During the fighting between Mujahedeen factions following the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1989, the AGS office found itself literally on the front lines, and was severely damaged. Throughout this period of conflict and during the later rule by the Taliban, the staff of the AGS under the guidance of Dr. Mir Akbar salvaged and protected documents, maps and samples, often at great personal risk to themselves and their families.

After the Taliban left Kabul, in December 2001, this precious data was returned to the AGS. Afghanistan, and the industry, owes a debt of gratitude to these dedicated professionals.

Following the fall of the Taliban regime, the Government of the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, with the assistance of the World Bank, began to formulate a mining sector strategy and policy.

Among many things, this recognized the need for the rehabilitation and restructuring of the AGS in order for it to perform to current, industry standards and be recognized as a modern geological survey, able to implement a program of geological mapping and resource assessment, using contemporary concepts and methods.

In response to this need, the British Geological Survey and United States Geological Survey commenced collaborative projects with the Afghanistan Geological Survey and Ministry of Mines and Industries in 2004. The combined efforts allowed for the implementation of a comprehensive program of capacity building, geological mapping, evaluation of mineral and hydro-geological resources and the creation of geological and mineral databases and geographical information systems. The furthering of programs and training for Afghan geologists and mining engineers was also impacted by this partnership.

Today, as the revised Minerals Law and the Law on Hydrocarbons are awaiting parliamentary approval, international donor activity has been enhanced. The ministry and its new leadership have segued into a new and more appropriate role of regulator, and revamped the entire tender procedure to more closely adhere to industry and world standards.

The result is the emergence of a mining regulatory, supervisory and monitoring authority that is comparable when viewed through any prism.