

Functions and achievements of FATA DA in the mineral sector development

Yaqoob Shah and Muhamamd Humayun
FATA, DA, Peshawar

The tribal belt spread over an area of about 27,220 km², out of which preliminary geological survey of about 85% has been completed. Geological investigations reveal the presence of various types of sedimentary, igneous and different grades of metamorphic rocks in age from Precambrian to Paleocene in the region. The area is characterized by the presence of variety of alteration zones. The presences of these geological features designate FATA with most suitable geological environments as compared to the rest of world where mineral deposits of economic grade have been established. These include metallic, energy minerals, precious/dimension stones and different rocks of industrial use. Resultantly, world-class deposits of marble, soapstone and potential resources of copper, manganese, chromite, coal and gemstones have been discovered in the tribal belt.

Preliminary geological studies during the past indicate the presence of 20 difference minerals out of which twelve have been explored in detail. The available geological information provides ample evidence that FATA has fairly good mineral potential as exist in similar geological environments elsewhere in the world. This mineral potential can be well utilized for sustainable socio-economic development of local population in particular and the region in general. It is important to point out that despite technological/financial constraints of the private sector and the prevailing geopolitical conditions in the region; there is a tremendous growth in mineral production from FATA. The average annual growth rate of mineral production during the last five years has been 40%.

In order to further enhance the mineral development potential of FATA, FATA DA has initiated a number of mineral exploration, infrastructure development and private sector facilitation projects which on successful completion will provide sound basis for planning mineral sector activities on scientific lines. This will further promote confidence building of private sector for investment in FATA, resulting in generation of enormous employment opportunities in the mineral-bearing areas and supply of indigenous raw material for consumption of local industry.

Geological exploration under two different projects resulted in identification of more than 28 manganese prospects and two emerald-bearing areas in Mohmand and Bajaur Agencies. After successful manufacturing of Ferro-manganese alloy on pilot plant scale, based on raw material from FATA, the same has been offered to private sector investors for commercial production which will serve as import substitute. To identify additional coal clusters, investigations in Shirani area, FR DI Khan have been initiated. For further enhancement of copper reserves (8 million tons) at Shinkai area, North Waziristan Agency, subsurface investigations including geophysical survey and drilling are being taken in hand. In order to confirm extension of

sulphide mineralization in the ophiolite belt extending through South Waziristan Agency, geotechnical studies are being started shortly.

As a result of geological investigation in collaboration with NCEG, University of Peshawar, the southern sedimentary belt of FATA, stretching from FR Peshawar in the north to FR DI Khan in the south, has shown encouraging hydrocarbon potential and based on these studies, Oil & Gas development companies have shown interest in further detailed exploration. Besides, laboratory scale R & D work for producing smokeless coal briquettes from FATA coal has successfully been completed, while, studies for pilot plant scale production and feasibility for establishment of commercially viable coal briquetting plant are being conducted. FATA DA established a Mines Rescue/Safety and Welfare Centre of Orakzai Agency, which is the first of its nature in the region. Its achievements have been appreciated at both national and international level. In addition to the above, to facilitate and attract the private sector investors for investment in mineral sector activities, construction of about 160 km roads has been planned in different mineral-bearing areas out of which more than 100 km have been completed, while the rest are in different stages of completion.