

**THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE OIL, GAS, AND CHEMICAL INDUSTRY
IN THE QASHQADARYO REGION DURING THE 1970s–1990s*****Kholiqov G'olib****Associate Professor at the University of Information Technology and Management****Nagmatov Ilyos Odil ugli****1st-year Master's Student at the University of Information Technology and Management*

Abstract: This article focuses on the condition of the oil and gas industry in Uzbekistan and the issues surrounding its development and study. It analyzes the processes through which Uzbekistan became one of the Union's key centers in the oil and gas sector.

Keywords: Oil, gas, World War II, Sho'rtepa, Sho'rchi, Karim, Kho'jaxayron, Qorakhitoy, Southern Muborak, Northern Muborak.

Even in the post–World War II period, the harsh consequences of the war were evident in all spheres of life in the republic, including industry. There was an acute need for electricity, fuel, and skilled engineering and technical personnel to restore industry in Uzbekistan and ensure the supply of industrial and food products to the population. Solving these complex issues required the development of clear programs for the growth of the national economy, taking into account Uzbekistan's geographical position, national traditions, and the interests of its people. However, this did not happen. Instead, recovery and development plans for Uzbekistan's economy were drawn up in accordance with the interests of the central authorities.

In the center's plans, Uzbekistan was seen merely as a peripheral region for supplying raw materials. This approach led to a one-sided development of the economy, with very few raw material processing enterprises, which in turn hindered the implementation of social programs. Uzbekistan's gas industry began to take shape as an independent sector in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

As a result, the mineral resources of the Samarkand–Qarshi economic region served not only the interests of the republic, but also of the entire country. In the southwestern part of the republic, particularly in the Qashqadaryo region, a number of natural gas fields were discovered, and systems for their exploitation were established. Consequently, Uzbekistan gradually became a major fuel base of the Union. At the same time, geological exploration activities intensified, and by the late 1950s and early 1960s, new oil and gas drilling sites were established in several areas of the Qarshi–Muborak steppes.

Several oil and gas fields such as "Sho'rtepa," "Sho'rchi," "Karim," "Kho'jaxayron," "Qorakhitoy," "Southern Muborak," and "Northern Muborak" were discovered. Among them, the Southern Muborak and Northern Muborak fields, discovered in 1958 and containing reserves of 65 billion cubic meters of gas, were among the largest. In 1962, the Hisoroldi Expedition of the "Qarshineftegazrazvedka" trust discovered the Odamtosh field, which confirmed the assumptions about abundant oil and gas reserves in the southwestern ridges of the Hisor Mountains. In 1968, the Gumbuloq field was also discovered in the same district.

In 1969, the implementation of rationalization and invention proposals within the "Qarshineftegazrazvedka" trust yielded an economic gain of 1.2 million rubles¹. In 1970, the five-year plan for natural gas reserve exploration by the "Qarshineftegazrazvedka" trust was fulfilled by 102%, while the target for increasing oil reserves was achieved by 109.7%. In addition, the presence of oil and gas was confirmed in 7 fields, 3 fields were commissioned for production, and 1 field was prepared for drilling².

In August 1972, the Qashqadaryo Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan reviewed and approved the comprehensive plan for the socio-economic and technical development of the "Qarshineftegazrazvedka" trust during the Ninth Five-Year Plan. Based on this decision, the implementation of both short-term and long-term operational plans was recommended.

In 1974, the "Uzbekneftegazrazvedka" association was established in the city of Qarshi on the basis of the "Qarshineftegazrazvedka," "Bukharaoilgasrazvedka," "Uzbekneftegeofizika" trusts and the Karakalpak deep drilling expedition. The association also incorporated geophysical teams, the Bukhara repair and mechanical plant, and research teams from the Institute for Oil and Gas Field Exploration. As a result, exploration and reconnaissance activities in Uzbekistan significantly accelerated.

On January 1, 1964, the "Muborak" oil and gas extraction site was established on the basis of the Sho'rtepa field near the Muborak railway station. It was located in part of the buildings belonging to the "Eastern Oil and Gas Exploration" enterprise, which had been opened between 1957 and 1959, and was organized under the "Kogonneftegaz" administration. In the same year, the first five oil and gas wells in the Sho'rtepa field were launched. The following year, 10 to 12 wells were put into operation.

In 1966, gas was first extracted from the "Southern Muborak" field, and several wells were drilled in the "Northern Muborak" field, which were brought to readiness for production. Due to the large reserves found in these fields, the "Qashqadaryogaz" gas field administration was established in 1966. To utilize the gas extracted from these ready-for-production fields for the national economy, specialists from the design and research institute of the gas industry in Saratov (Russia) developed the project for the construction of the main gas pipeline: "Muborak – Zirabulok – Tashkent – Chimkent – Frunze (Bishkek) – Alma-Ata"³. The construction of this gas pipeline, which stretches over 1,300 kilometers, began in 1964, and by October 1966, the section reaching Tashkent was completed. Subsequently, the southern regions of the Kyrgyz SSR and the Kazakh SSR also began utilizing this gas pipeline.

Due to the presence of hydrogen sulfide—even in small quantities—in the raw gas extracted from the Southern Muborak and Northern Muborak fields, it became necessary to process the gas. Especially, when samples of gas from the O'rtabuloq field were analyzed by research institutes, it was scientifically confirmed that the gas contained 4–5% hydrogen sulfide. This finding necessitated the construction of a gas processing facility on the steppe to safely refine the extracted gas⁴.

¹ Жўрақулов О. Қудратли энергия манбаи. – Тошкент: Ўқитувчи, 1982. – 150 б.

² Ўша асарда

³ Омонов О. Муборак газни қайта ишлаш заводи – 35 ёшда. – Тошкент: Янги аср авлоди, 2006. –15-6 б.

⁴ Газни олтингуртдан тозаламасдан туриб фодаланиш инсон саломатлиги учун хавфли бўлиб, иқтисодий жиҳатдан ҳам зарарли ҳисобланган. Олтингуртли газ қувурлардан жўнатилган ҳолатда ҳам у газ қувурларини емириб, яроқсиз ҳолатга келтириб қўйиши мумкин эди.

The Ministry of the Gas Industry of the USSR prepared a project for the construction of a large gas desulfurization plant near the “Muborak” livestock breeding center in the Qarshi desert, and submitted it for government approval. However, due to the significant financial investment required, the issue remained unresolved for some time.

It was only after experts substantiated that the construction costs would be recovered relatively quickly and that sulfur itself is a vital raw material for both the chemical and defense industries, that permission was granted for the construction of the plant. Since such plants were rare in the country, the project was developed by scientists and engineer-technicians from the “Vostokgiprogaz” institute in Saratov and the “Giprogazochistka” institute in Moscow. According to O. Jo‘raqulov, the total cost of constructing the plant was estimated at over 88 million rubles, and it was calculated that this investment would be fully recouped within two and a half years after the plant was commissioned⁵.

In October 1966, the Ministry of the Gas Industry of the USSR adopted a resolution approving the plant construction project developed by the scientific research and design institute “VNIPI Gazdobicha.” In August 1967, a decree was issued by the government of Uzbekistan, as well as the regional and republican ministries of agriculture, to allocate land for the construction of the Muborak Gas-Sulfur Plant Complex in Qashqadaryo region. Following the decree, the first teams of builders began arriving at the site.

Among them were the highly experienced specialists of the “BukharaGazPromStroy” trust, headed by V.M. Kondruchuk, who had significant expertise in constructing gas industry facilities and residential housing. Builders from Qarshi, Samarkand, and other regions also took part in the project.

Construction of the plant involved four major building organizations: the “BukharaGazPromStroy,” “SredAzNefteGazStroy,” “SamarkandTransStroy” trusts, and the “QarshiStroy” administration. Complex equipment and machinery for the plant were imported from Yugoslavia, Romania, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and Czechoslovakia. Storage areas and warehouses for sulfur were constructed, and pipelines were laid to transport desulfurized gas to industrial centers.

Since the process of extracting sulfur from the gas was water-based, a 158 km-long pipeline was laid from Yakkabog‘ to Muborak to ensure a stable water supply. In response to the increasing demands for gas extraction outlined in sequential planning directives, it was decided to construct a second gas processing plant in 1977–1978 to raise the volume of purified gas to 15 billion cubic meters. By the end of the five-year plan, an additional plant of similar capacity was also scheduled for construction. To further increase gas delivery by 1.6 billion cubic meters, the No. 9 division of the “SredAzNefteGazMontazh” trust began repair work at the plant in July 1976. The project included replacing technological columns, and repairing equipment and pipelines, with the completion of all works scheduled for August 7⁶.

In general, local specialists and experts from different regions of the country conducted in-depth studies of the Kyzylkum deserts and the Qarshi plains over many years in order to explore and identify gas deposits⁷. As a result, the abundance of oil and gas fields in the Qashqadaryo region brought to the forefront the need to establish independent enterprises

⁵ Жўракулов О. Қудратли энергия манбаи. – Тошкент, 1982. – Б.175.

⁶ Петров В. Реконструкция идет по графику, но ее можно и нужно ускорить // Правда Востока. 1976. – С.76.

⁷ Паньковский В. Ўзбекистон зангори олтини. –Тошкент, 1961. – Б.10.

specialized in oil extraction. In 1971, the “Qarshineft” Oil and Gas Production Administration, under the Ministry of the Oil Industry of the USSR, was established in Qarshi⁸.

Between 1972 and 1985, the Muborak Gas Processing Plant — ranked second in the world after the Orenburg Gas Processing Plant — was constructed, becoming one of the largest industrial facilities of its kind globally⁹. The Muborak Gas Processing Plant began production in 1972, and its final units were commissioned in 1973. Once operational, the plant became a major industrial complex, supplying up to 220,000 tons of sulfur¹⁰. According to the original design, the plant was intended to process 5 billion cubic meters of gas annually. However, after the sulfur purification facilities built in the first stage were repaired in 1976, the plant’s processing capacity increased to 6.2 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. By the 1980s, the plant was processing up to 21 billion cubic meters of gas annually, producing 554,000 tons of sulfur and over 6,000 tons of gas condensate¹¹.

During this period, more than 52 oil and gas fields were discovered in the Qashqadaryo region, many of which possessed large gas condensate reserves. Based on the gas found in fields within the Hisoroldi oil and gas zone — including Gumbuloq, Pachkamar, Qorayli, Sho’rtan, Northern Sho’rtan, Omonota, Ko’kdumaloq, Jarquduq, Southern Tandirchi, and others — the Sho’rtan Gas Complex and Ko’kdumaloq field were established. These sites became not only the largest in the republic but also among the most significant in the entire Greater Central Asian economic region¹².

However, numerous challenges emerged in the utilization of these discovered resources. For instance, in the “Qarshineft” administration alone, the number of uninstalled equipment units reached 47,338 in 1976 and increased to 96,355 in 1977¹³. At the same time, the Soviet state's policy of intensive exploitation of underground resources led to long-term and irreversible consequences. Despite numerous decisions and project proposals adopted since 1982 for the construction of the Shurtan Gas-Chemical Complex, the planned objectives were not fully realized. Although the gas fields were developed and served the national interests, they had a significant negative impact on the environment. For example, at the Muborak Gas Processing Plant, over 136,000 tons of toxic gases were either released into the atmosphere or burned annually. As a result, residents in many districts of the region suffered. This environmental damage led to the drying of fruit trees and caused grapevines to wither before ripening. Moreover, the wastewater discharged from the plant had a detrimental effect on the surrounding ecosystem¹⁴.

In conclusion, the exploration of natural resources in the post-war years was carried out systematically and according to planned directives. Due to the strategic importance of developing the gas industry for the national economy, all necessary conditions were created to accelerate the functioning of the entire complex. As a result of geological exploration conducted during the 1950s–1980s, Uzbekistan emerged as one of the leading republics in the Soviet Union in terms of natural gas reserves.

⁸ Жўрақулов О. Қудратли энергия манбаи. — Тошкент: Ўқитувчи, 1982. — Б. 102.

⁹ Мирзаакбарова Р., Алиев Т. Ўзбекистон табиий газы (Газ саноаты экономикасининг баъзи масалалари ҳақида). — Тошкент: Ўзбекистон, 1974. — Б. 8.

¹⁰ Жўрақулов О. Қудратли энергия манбаи. — Тошкент, 1982. — Б. 175.

¹¹ Қашқадарё газы: бугун ва эртага // Ҳаёт ва қонун. 1992, №5. — Б. 57.

¹² Ўша жойда

¹³ Ўз МА, Р-2762-фонд, 1-рўйхат, 1340-йиғма жилд, 33- варақ.

¹⁴ Қашқадарё газы: бугун ва эртага // Ҳаёт ва қонун. 1992, №5. — Б. 57.

On the basis of these reserves, a new industrial sector — the gas industry (including extraction and processing) — was established and became one of the leading branches of the national economy. It should also be noted that during the period under analysis, the discovery of new fields and the commissioning of new enterprises created numerous job opportunities. However, their activities caused significant harm to the natural environment and the surrounding ecosystems.

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