

## International

# Under the Taleban regime, drug addicts forced into withdrawal

## Afghanistan provides 90% of world's production of heroin

**KABUL:** With shaved heads, oversized tunics and the terrified gaze of the hunted, the drug addicts rounded up by the Taleban brace for 45 days of painful withdrawal. For some, the hardliners' raids may potentially help them cast off the yoke of addiction. But for many the stay at Kabul's Ibn Sina centre will just mark a short change of scene, marked by a brutal approach to forcing users off their powerful dependence.

Before the Taleban marched into Kabul on August 15, police in the capital would sometimes arrest addicts and transfer them to the centre. But since the hardline Islamists took control, the frequency of raids on areas where addicts gather appears to have increased. Hundreds of users shelter in squalid conditions at Pul-e-Sukhta, under a bridge in western Kabul synonymous with hard drugs and violent crime.

They recognize the rehab clinic's ambulance, and those who can lift themselves off the fetid ground stagger down the rubbish-strewn Paghman River to avoid capture, while many are too intoxicated to wake up. Two Taleban fighters, armed with M16 and AK-47 rifles, prod the comatose heroin and methamphetamine users with their gun barrels as outreach workers wrestle with men before forcing them to the vehicle.

Raw sewage runs straight into the boggy river bed, and the stench of urine, faeces and vomit in the crowded drug den is overwhelming. Cushions, blankets, sandbags and tarpaulins make up the ramshackle camp, which is littered with the addicts' paraphernalia: syringes, wraps, foil and pipes. The gunmen fire a few shots into the air to assert their authority and shock the addicts, before about 20 are rounded up and whisked away.

### Searches and checks

During their 45-day rehabilitation stay at the 1,000-bed centre, the men spend their time lying on cots in large dormitories or crouched in the yard, soaking up the autumn sun. There is little methadone available to help wean the opium and heroin addicts,

and nothing to remove the withdrawal pains for those being weaned off of meth, doctors say.

This morning, Emal, 36, shuffles into the registration room. - A volunteer, who like many others working here is a former addict, opens his logbook. Name? Emal. Your father's name? Abdul Matin. Married? Yes. I have three children, two girls and one boy. Working? Not currently. What drugs do you take? Crystal (meth). Have you been here before? Yes, three times. This is my fourth. I was discharged 10 days ago. As Emal leaves, 22-year-old Bilal Ahmad, skinny and jittery, takes a seat.

He is also addicted to meth, and has been through the program before, "one or one and a half year years ago". "I am happy to be here," he tells AFP, casting fearful, furtive glances around the room that indicate he is not. "In 45 days, God will



11% of Afghans are drug users

ing, we can go home." The men are searched carefully when they arrive. "Open your mouth. Wider. Lift your tongue," another member of staff at the clinic tells the new arrivals, before checking their shoes and clothes for traces of drugs. In groups of six, they then shuffle to the tiled building that houses the showers.

There their baggy khaki tunics and trousers are removed and they are handed a packet of shampoo, but no towel. When they emerge, dripping, they are handed over to a team of barbers who shave their heads to prevent the spread of lice, but leave their scraggy beards. Some are taken to rooms lined with



KABUL: Drug addicts wait to register at the Avicenna Medical Hospital for Drug Treatment in Kabul. — AFP

five beds, while others are ushered into a dormitory where around 30 men of all ages are already lying on top of their covers. One childishly plays a bamboo flute. Another gestures to his mouth indicating that he is hungry.

### 'Terrible problem'

Poppy cultivation was banned under the Taleban's last rule in the 1990s, but the export of heroin from Taleban-controlled areas provided the hardliners with billions of dollars during their insurgency against the United States and the Western-backed government. With poppies cheap and easy to grow, Afghanistan provides around 90 percent of the world's production of heroin. Crystal methamphetamine production has also surged, created from the ephedra plant which grows wild in the country.

According to anti-narcotics experts, 11 percent of Afghanistan's 34 million population are drug users,

with four to six percent addicted. Since sweeping back into power, the Taleban have promised not to allow narcotics production. "It is the policy of the Islamic Emirate," said Doctor Ahmad Zohar Sultani, who heads the centre located in an old US army base. For now, the staff in the centre are all working without pay. Salaries have not been paid out for four months as Afghanistan's economy teeters on the verge of collapse.

Sultani says he was worried that the Taleban would shut his clinic when they first seized power. "Their intentions towards us were not clear," he told AFP, adding though that the country's new rulers had "quickly told us they wanted us to continue." In signs he is adapting to the new regime, the doctor has since mid-August swapped out his Western suit and tie for the traditional shalwar kameez, and has removed all of the photographs that once filled the walls of his office. "Drugs are a terrible problem," he said. — AFP

### News in brief

#### 'Miracle' pair found alive

**SYDNEY:** Two people have survived days without water in Australia's hot and dusty outback, police said yesterday, ending a frenzied five-day air and land rescue effort. Twenty-one-year-old Shaun Emitja and 14-year-old Mahesh Patrick were reported missing on Tuesday in the Harts Range area of central Australia. They had failed to return to the remote community of Hermannsburg after a weekend away. After their blue Nissan Navara was found abandoned and bogged down in a dirt track, police scoured the countryside using a helicopter and expert trackers. The pair were feared to be in grave danger given a lack of water and the area's extreme temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius in what is still the southern hemisphere's spring. But Northern Territory police said Monday that the two men—who had become separated—were found alive and well by an "absolute miracle". — AFP

#### Two shootings in a week

**WASHINGTON:** One person was killed and another seven injured at a US university shooting early Sunday, police said, just days after another firearm incident at the same school left one dead. A student was among those wounded in the attack at around 1:30am (local) at Grambling State University, Louisiana State Police said, with one person in critical condition at hospital. The school tweeted the student was "treated for non-life-threatening injuries", and the person killed was not enrolled at the university. It is the second shooting in less than a week - although the incidents are not believed to be connected - at the historically Black college in the southern US state. Homecoming activities - an annual football game accompanied by parties - were canceled as were yesterday and today classes, the school said. — AFP

#### Sudanese protesters rally

**KHARTOUM:** Dozens of pro-army demonstrators in Sudan marched for a third consecutive day in the capital Khartoum yesterday, demanding Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok step down, AFP journalists said. Hamdok, who gathered his cabinet for an "urgent" meeting, has called recent unrest the "worst and most dangerous crisis" of the country's precarious two-year transition since the fall of hardline ruler Omar al-Bashir. "Down with Hamdok!" the pro-military protesters cried, their demonstration unhindered by security forces. The protesters demand the dissolution of Sudan's post-dictatorship interim government, which is mired in both political and economic crises. "The civilian government has failed," said Tahir Fadl al-Mawla, a 52-year-old tribal elder, speaking at a tent erected at the gates of the presidential palace. — AFP

## Two more laborers killed in Kashmir in spate of shootings

**SRINAGAR:** Two laborers were killed by gunmen in Indian-administered Kashmir Sunday, police said, the latest victims of a fresh outbreak of violence that has sent jitters through the disputed Muslim-majority region. The two laborers, who were Hindus from Bihar, a state outside the Himalayan territory, were shot in the southern Wanpoh area of Kashmir valley. A third was critically injured, police said. The killings came a day after a street vendor and a laborer, also from Bihar, were killed in separate shootings. One was Muslim, the other was Hindu.

No group has immediately claimed responsibility for the four deaths, which have sent shockwaves through minority communities in the region. Tensions have risen in Kashmir since August 2019 when Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government scrapped the region's semi-autonomy and brought it under New Delhi's direct rule. This was accompanied by a huge security operation and

communications blackout with tens of thousands of extra soldiers joining the estimated half a million already on the ground.

Modi said the change was to end decades of violence and bring prosperity to Kashmir. But locals said the laws enacted since then favored Indians from outside the territory. The latest killings come hard on the heels of a series of street shootings last week that left seven more civilians dead, among them three members of the local Hindu and Sikh communities. Those shootings were claimed by The Resistance Front (TRF) rebel group, which accused them of working for India's security agencies.

In total, 32 civilians have been shot dead this year so far, a majority of them local Muslims. Meanwhile deadly clashes between insurgents and government forces have claimed roughly 30 lives - including soldiers and rebels - in the past two weeks. Police said five TRF militants have been killed since last week, including



SRINAGAR: A woman paramilitary trooper stands guard during a random search in Srinagar yesterday as security has been beefed-up a day after two laborers from Bihar were killed by gunmen. — AFP

two on Saturday. Two soldiers died in a firefight near the ceasefire line between India- and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir on Saturday, the military said.

Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan since their independence from British rule in 1947. The nuclear-armed rivals have fought

two wars over its control. An armed rebellion against Indian rule of Kashmir started in 1989 with groups demanding independence or merger of the region with Pakistan. Tens of thousands of people, mostly civilians, have died in the fighting. Pakistan denies India's repeated accusations that it supports the rebels. — AFP

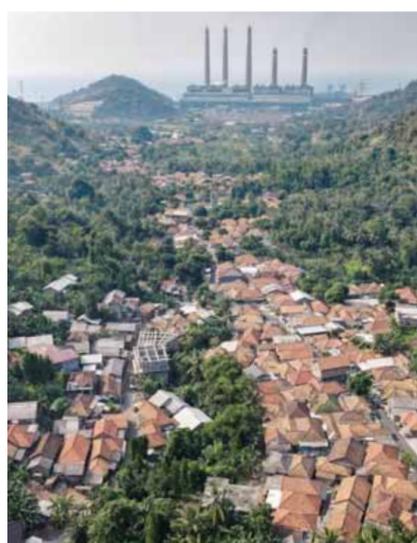
## 'Running out of time': Asia struggles to kick coal addiction

**CILEGON:** Smokestacks belch noxious fumes into the air from a massive coal-fired power plant on the Indonesian coast, a stark illustration of Asia's addiction to the fossil fuel which is threatening climate targets. Asia-Pacific accounts for about three-quarters of global coal consumption - even as the region struggles with the environmental and public health impacts of global warming, from deadly levels of air pollution in India to extreme heatwaves and wildfires in Australia.

Hopes for a cleaner future have been fired by pledges from top coal consumer China and other countries to go carbon neutral but much of the region is making a painfully slow transition to renewable sources. "We are moving much slower than the impact of climate change. We are running out of time," warned Tata Mustasya, a Greenpeace energy campaigner in Indonesia.

Change is hard in one of the last bastions of the dirtiest fossil fuel, however - five Asian countries are responsible for 80 percent of new coal power stations planned worldwide, according to a report from Carbon Tracker. Commitments that have been made are too weak, analysts say, with promises to halt construction of plants and tighten overseas funding from key financing countries often not covering projects already planned.

And critics say that rich nations are not providing enough help, in terms of financing or technical know-how, to help poorer countries make the transition. The challenge is illustrated by the enormous Suralaya coal plant on Indonesia's Java island, one of the biggest in Southeast Asia, which can power



CILEGON: Photo shows village houses as smoke rises from the chimneys at the Suralaya coal power plant in Cilegon. — AFP

about 14 million homes a year. Indonesia has committed to be carbon neutral by 2060, and to stop building new coal-fired plants from 2023, but despite this - the facility is undergoing a \$3.5 billion expansion that will boost its capacity. Burning coal is responsible for a massive chunk of carbon dioxide emissions, making it a major threat to limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, as agreed in the 2015 Paris climate deal. But beyond its contribution to global warming, it also exacts a heavy toll on local communities. — AFP

## Malala sends letter to Taleban after girls' school ban

**KABUL:** Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Pakistani Taleban as a schoolgirl, has urged Afghanistan's new rulers to let girls return to school. It has been one month since the hardline Islamist Taleban, which seized power in August, excluded girls from returning to secondary school while ordering boys back to class. The Taleban have claimed they will allow girls to return once they have ensured security and stricter segregation under their interpretation of Islamic law-but many are sceptical.

"To the Taleban authorities...reverse the de facto ban on girls' education and re-open girls' secondary schools immediately," Yousafzai and a number of Afghan women's rights activists said in an open letter published on Sunday. Yousafzai called on the leaders of Muslim nations to make it clear to the Taleban that "religion does not justify preventing girls from going to school". "Afghanistan is now the only country in the world that forbids girls' education," said the writers, who included the head of the Afghan human rights commission under the last US-backed government Shaharzar Akbar.

The authors called on G20 world leaders to provide urgent funding for an education plan for Afghan children. A petition alongside the letter had yesterday received more than 640,000 signatures. Education activist Yousafzai was shot by militants from the Tehreek-e-Taleban Pakistan, an offshoot of the Afghan Taleban, in her home town in the Swat valley while on a school bus in 2012. Now 24 years old, she advocates for girls' education, with her non-profit Malala Fund having invested \$2 million in Afghanistan. — AFP