

Drug addiction and trafficking on the rise



Md. ASADULLAH KHAN

In the backdrop of the menacing cloud of drug abuse and drug trafficking looming large, the nation seems incapable of stemming the tide of this scourge. With the seizure of about 5 kg of heroin from a house in the old part of the city worth 5 crore taka in the last week of last month, it seems this illicit trade has invaded the peaceful home environment of the country. Most worrisome as the Hon. Adviser of the Ministry of Health pointed out in a seminar on the control of drug abuse last week that almost 7 percent of the drug addicts in the country have been diagnosed to be suffering from AIDS. Although the number of AIDS patients in the country is still low, yet the finding has created a ripple in the sensible citizenry as reports of recovery of drugs like heroin, Phensedyl and the latest brand Yaba are pouring in.

The easy tolerance of the 80s, when drug was something of a personal addictive habit, has turned into a real menace. The various types of drugs now available in the market, in considerable quantities, now spell disaster for the society. And to a nation that espouses adherence to religious principle, commitment to piety, morality and strict code of puritan life, drug addiction has emerged as the dark side of our character. The country, it seems, is going to be awash with this 'giver of euphoria and taker of life.'

Although crimes of different nature, including peddling of drugs, have decreased considerably after this caretaker government has taken over, still some shanties, uncrowded lanes and alley ways of old Dhaka and even some posh areas and most worryingly, some lanes and by lanes close to some schools have turned into sprawling markets of drugs like Phensedyl and Yaba. Kids in the age group of 12-14 use some code names to sell these drugs. For safe trading and operation, a handful of youth in these areas serve as lookouts, drug packagers and sometimes as arms bearing soldiers. It has reportedly been learnt that teachers of

such schools know about this clandestine trade going on very close to their institutions and some students experimenting it on a regular basis but they are held hostage by these notorious groups.

The number of addicts in the country, it is known through a survey of UNDP and other NGOs has swelled to more than 30 lakh from 10 lakh in 1996. The number of beds in some drug rehabilitation centres in the city was in the neighbourhood of 50 in the late 90s and

cal conflict are now raiding homes and killing civilians in broad daylight. In consequence, Dhaka, once a decent city, has turned into an abode of criminals as well with horrifying images of killing, abduction, rape, extortion and looting.

It's hard to believe, and harder still to comprehend ... but it is true. The majority of heinous crimes in the country today are being committed by these young addicts as a survey by the police department has revealed. Sadly true, most of

ers knew about it they could not be touched because of the protection and patronage they enjoyed from the ruling bosses. Otherwise how could a food items manufacturing company in the country could continue exporting heroin worth crores of taka to London for years under cover of food items? People would never have known it unless London police had exposed it. People do not know till now what action was taken against that company and its owners after this

against drug abuse, our chances of living as a healthy nation with commitment to social progress and prosperity and curbing chaos will remain a far cry. Hopefully, the Hon'ble Adviser for Law, Information and Public Works has in a recent seminar on control of drug abuse sounded taking some measures that instills hope in the public mind.

Researchers have studied the effects of drugs on the brain and believe that it interferes with normal bio-chemical agents that control the desire for food, sex and sleep. Given a choice between food and drugs in laboratory experiments, monkeys would become hooked on to cocaine or heroin and take it until they starve to death. Humans also become as much manic. Taking the fact into consideration that the drive to intoxication is irrepressible and unstoppable like hunger and sex, the whole society including the parents, teachers in schools and colleges have to mount an aggressive attack on the loopholes in the society. The problem, experts point out cannot be erased by even the most concerted government crusade alone. Experts also point to deep-seated causes that produce a continued craving for drugs: lack of community, disintegration of the family, moral laxity and the relentless pressure to perform in a fast paced society.

For years while much of the world battled the drug plague, we were largely immune. Drug trade or drug abuse never proliferated as a problem and never concerned us as such since in most cases it was considered as a taboo. But now that attitude is changing. Researchers and pragmatists blame persistent economic hardship and the stress of living in a society facing unemployment and social inequity for driving increasing number of people, especially youths, to seek refuge in drugs.

In a large measure it is the responsibility of the parents to step up restoration of moral values that are eroding fast. Many of the parents, especially mothers are not giving enough time in raising their children in a proper way. Some of these parents who are affluent beyond measure are given to habits that transgress the limits of our traditional social norms and family values, alienating the children from the family and making them disillusioned. In a bid to find out the solutions to these problems, we must fulfil our commitment to our children.

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Everyone across communities has a responsibility

Open and honest debate is always the way forward. Take foreign policy. Two years ago when I went round the country I felt there was a lot of anger about foreign policy. I fully respect people's right to protest. But it's important to recognise the £5bn of aid that the UK has given the Muslim world in five years, or the support that this country's government has given at critical times in Bosnia or Indonesia -- or Pakistan following the devastating earthquake in 2005.

HAZEL BLEARS

I am extremely proud to be Communities Secretary and delighted to be working in a role that involves talking to our diverse communities and working to build trust, respect and understanding.

I know this is a difficult time, a tense time, for people up and down the country. There are suggestions that there is an international element to the attempted bombings in London and Glasgow. Inevitably, many are speculating about Al-Qaida involvement. The truth is that it's too early to tell in this case.

But I acknowledge that those in our Muslim communities can feel like they are under the spotlight. I appreciate that can be difficult and I'd like to pay tribute to the way that the UK's communities have responded so far -- with calm, courage and strength.

Everyone across communities has a responsibility to reject violent extremism and show leadership on this issue.

Terrorists seek to sow mistrust among Britain's different communities. They want to undermine the tolerance that is one of our country's great strengths. But we will

show them we stand united in our values and in our determination.

In Government, I want to build on my experience, and the important work of my predecessor Ruth Kelly, to promote greater understanding and speak up for the values that we all share. Part of this means ensuring that every single person -- no matter what their background -- has the opportunity to get on in life, and I will work with colleagues across Government to break down the barriers that still hold too many people back.

But I see my role more as looking out, than looking in. When I was a Home Office Minister I went to visit many diverse communities and I want to do more of that in my new role - listening to communities, learning from communities. Getting opinions from all traditions and backgrounds. It's also important for me to talk with those -- like women, and young people -- who sometimes feel their voice has not been heard.

We won't always see eye to agree eye. That's quite natural. But open and honest debate is always the way forward. Take foreign policy. Two years ago when I went round the

country I felt there was a lot of anger about foreign policy. I fully respect people's right to protest. But it's important to recognise the £5bn of aid that the UK has given the Muslim world in five years, or the support that this country's government has given at critical times in Bosnia or Indonesia -- or Pakistan following the devastating earthquake in 2005. If we don't put forward those facts then we create a vacuum where violent extremists can peddle their distorted and vicious arguments. And while in the short term a strong security response is an essential part of stopping violent extremism, in the long term winning the argument -- and making the case for peace, tolerance and respect for all -- is just as crucial.

No-one should be naive about the scale of the challenge. But I am optimistic. I am looking forward to having the debate with you about the kind of society we want to be. One that is enriched by its diversity. But united by common ideals. And I hope that by working in partnership we can make all our communities stronger and safer for years to come.

Hazel Blears, MP, is Britain's Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

The rising and falling power of hydrocarbon states

Oil income has enabled Chavez to consolidate his popular base at home. And he has used price discounts on petroleum to gain diplomatic backing of the Caribbean and Central American countries to the detriment of Washington. He has financially helped debt-ridden Latin American countries like Argentina.

DILIP HIRO

THE fast rising demand for oil by China and India, sharply declining fresh discoveries, and high prices are empowering the countries with large reserves of black gold as never before. Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez, provides a striking example of how petroleum has emboldened leaders of oil-rich states to thumb their noses at the giant neighbour in the north -- the US.

Aside from his hint that Venezuela might be seeking nuclear power, the highlight of Chavez's recent visit to Moscow was to finalise a contract to purchase five Russian diesel submarines for \$1 billion to safeguard his country's oil-rich underwater shelf and thwart a possible embargo by the US in response to his anti-Washington crusade in Latin America for the past several years. Under his presidency, Venezuela has become the second largest purchaser of Russian weapons after Algeria.

"We are strengthening Venezuela's military power precisely to avoid imperial aggression and assure peace, not to attack anybody," said Chavez in a recent speech at a military base in Caracas.

The arms procurement is funded by a treasury overflowing with foreign exchange due to high petroleum prices. This gives Chavez the clout to challenge the US, sorely dependent on imports of Venezuelan oil, and insult President George Bush with impunity.

Oil income has enabled Chavez to consolidate his popular base at home. And he has used price discounts on petroleum to gain diplomatic backing of the Caribbean and Central American countries to the detriment of Washington. He has financially helped debt-ridden Latin American countries like Argentina.

At the same time Chavez is forging strong hydrocarbon ties with oil-hungry China as insurance for the day when the US decides to stop importing the Venezuelan crude. By 2009 Venezuela's oil exports to China will treble to 500,000 barrels per day (bpd).

A Chinese oil company is collaborating with the state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA to explore a new heavy oil field in the Orinoco Basin. "The support of China is very important [to us] from the political and moral point of view," Chavez said during his visit to China last year.

Another leader recently challenging Washington is Russian President Vladimir Putin. He threatened to point his military's nuclear missiles at European cities, if Bush extended the present California-Alaska anti-missile defence line to Poland and the Czech Republic. This threat was the latest illustration of a radical change in the Kremlin's foreign policy, with Putin repeatedly attacking Washington's stance in

the international arena.

His tough stance stems from the soaring wealth created by the extraction of Russia's enormous hydrocarbon reserves and his policy of bringing the leading Russian hydrocarbon companies under the control of the Kremlin and using them as an instrument of Russia's foreign policy.

Four years ago Russia overtook the US to become the world's second largest oil producer after Saudi Arabia. Last year Gazprom, a Russian company, forged ahead of BP as the globe's second largest energy corporation by market value.

With petroleum prices rising fivefold between 1998 -- when the Russian ruble crashed, forcing the Kremlin to beg for foreign financial aid -- and now, the Russian treasury is overflowing with cash. It has since paid off its foreign loans and built up a foreign exchange nearing \$300 billion.

Another example of oil riches enabling a country's leaders to act with uncommon resolve is Iran. Its refusal to suspend enrichment of uranium demanded by the United Nations Security Council has led to two sets of sanctions against it. But these have proved ineffective. Iran's exports are rising and the high oil prices mean that the government can go on using the hydrocarbon revenue on subsidies for food and fuel at home.

What would really hurt Iran are sanctions on oil exports. But, given the rising demand for the commodity, the tight supply in the petroleum market and the fact that Iran is the second largest oil exporter in the Organisation of Oil Exporting Countries, a ban on the oil trade with Iran is almost inconceivable.

Iran's threat to cut off its petroleum exports, if attacked militarily by the US or Israel, thus causing a big jump in prices, has so far restrained the hawks in the US and Israeli governments.

These examples amply illustrate how petroleum has proved to be a leading factor in determining international relations.

Condoleezza Rice made this discovery only after becoming the US Secretary of State in January 2005. In her testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in April 2006, she said: "Nothing has taken me back more as secretary of state than the way that the politics of energy is -- I will use the word 'warping' -- diplomacy around the world."

This statement from a former director of Chevron was truly astonishing: It showed her ignorance of oil's importance in America's diplomatic annals. Summing up the post-World War II situation in August 1945, a top US State Department official wrote: "A review of the diplomatic history of the past 35 years will show that petroleum has historically played a larger part in the external

relations of the United States than any other commodity." This quote appears in many US history textbooks.

Actually, the US has the distinction of being the first to "warp" diplomacy by deploying oil to further its economic and diplomatic interests. During the first six decades of the last century, when the US was the leading producer of oil, the government used the commodity to further national interests abroad.

The US did so when joining the Allies in April 1917, at a time when its oil output amounted to two-thirds of the global total. By supplying four-fifths of the Allies' petroleum needs, in addition to sending troops, Washington helped defeat the Central Powers.

As a quick pro quo after the war, the US compelled the victorious Britain and France to give open access to American companies in Europe and the Middle East (under the British and French mandates) where the discovery of a bountiful oilfield in Iran in 1908 held the prospect of hydrocarbon cornucopia.

Once the US entered World War II in December 1941, its petroleum companies began extracting oil furiously to supply the Allies, thus depleting the proven reserves at an alarming rate. Worried policymakers turned their attention to Saudi Arabia where a massive oilfield had been discovered in 1938. That forged strong links between Washington and Riyadh, which continue to this day.

In 1956, when Britain-France-Israel invaded Egypt, the Egyptians blocked the Suez Canal with sunken ships, thus disrupting oil supplies from the Persian Gulf region to Western Europe. The West Europeans appealed to US President Dwight Eisenhower to meet their oil needs, knowing that American petroleum corporations at home had a spare capacity of 4 million bpd.

But Eisenhower refused to oblige. He regarded the UN-brokered ceasefire inadequate and urged the occupying forces to withdraw from Egypt. Facing crippling oil shortages as winter advanced, London and Paris conceded a quick evacuation.

However, once US oil output peaked in 1970 and began declining irrevocably thereafter, making the nation increasingly dependent on petroleum imports -- currently accounting for three out of five oil barrels consumed domestically -- it could no longer wield the oil weapon.

Such will be the fate, a half-century from now, for the countries now enjoying an economic boom and hefty diplomatic clout due to their hydrocarbon riches.

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BITTER TRUTH

For years while much of the world battled the drug plague, we were largely immune. Drug trade or drug abuse never proliferated as a problem and never concerned us as such since in most cases it was considered as a taboo. But now that attitude is changing. Researchers and pragmatists blame persistent economic hardship and the stress of living in a society facing unemployment and social inequity for driving increasing number of people, especially youths, to seek refuge in drugs.

now it has increased to more than 1000, and almost all of them are run by private initiative. Over the years hundreds of thousands of poor people, especially the youngsters within the age range 14 to 30 without any job or business have flocked to the capital city in search of work and a better life. Few found either and packed themselves into shanties. Shockingly true, many of the desperate turned to crime to make a living working under the protection of some influential godfathers who operate this clandestine business but have always evaded arrest because of high connections and money dealings.

Unsurprisingly, drug, crime and youth make a potent and heady cocktail. Some of us may find watching films based on such themes entertaining and go to bed with the reassurance that it was all fiction. However what is on the silver screen is coming more closer to our neighbourhood than we would have thought. There is a general sense of alarm across the nation, aroused by a spurt in crime involving the young, mostly addicts and including everything from extortion to robbery and even ghastly murder as a recent survey by different social organisations and NGOs have revealed.

In recent years, especially during the last five years, the vicious modus operandi of these drug thugs has evoked much fear in public mind. Teenage addicts and drug peddlers engaged by powerful persons with a vile motive to eliminate their adversaries relating to land dispute or business and politi-

cally these young criminals, operating individually or in gangs, seem to come from affluent families and the crimes they commit seem to be more vicious than before. An SSC level student in the city hires 'assassins' to kill another classmate who refused to stop going around with a girl he wanted for himself. In another case an addict paramour incensed by the girl's refusal to marry him, blocked her way back from school, forced her to an abandoned house and there he raped her and then killed her by strangulating.

Not surprisingly, the most devastating impact of drug addiction and drug dealings is a rise in violent crimes, not just a surge in extortion, mugging and armed robbery but lethal violence. In recent years, Dhaka city's homicide rates have gone up several times and possibly Dhaka now leads the world in deaths by firearms. Expert analysis says that almost 70 per cent of the violence is credited to either getting or using drugs. They operate either by themselves or are engaged as hired goons by the drug lords or other agencies to serve their vile ends.

Ironically the drug dealing has peaked to such new heights because of the improvement in telecommunication technology like cellular phones, besides easy availability of sophisticated weapons smuggled in the country through all possible routes.

Perhaps during the last five years of the BNP-Jamaat alliance rule drug barons ruled supreme in their dens, and if people and law enforce-

racket was unearthed.

The drug dealers, it appears, are bewitching susceptible kids and gullible housewives and unsuspecting young girls who never dared coming out of their houses even under compelling situations of impoverishment. As a recent newspaper report suggests, Shahida, a young college going girl in village Satani of Sathkira and her mother and two young sisters were won over by the drug lords for a round trip to Dhaka in a private car in exchange of carrying 400 bottles of Phensedyl, which Shahida now says after capture by the police she did not know.

For the present caretaker government that has waged a war against all types of evils, the crack-down on drugs has to be the latest imperative. As revealed by newspaper reports, the current drug addiction and drug trafficking has alarmingly peaked and the fear that has seized the society is hardly unwarranted because the addict son is killing his father and an addict husband is killing his wife on her refusal to bring drug money from her parent's house. As reports indicate Bangladesh till now continues to be a transit route for drug trafficking. The government must not only promise but also implement a massive drug education campaign and nation-wide drive for drug-free parks, marketplaces, restaurants, hotels and last of all schools.

Unless the government can rid the country of this scourge by a sustained effort through mobilisation of every segment of the society

International Day of Non-violence and Mahatma Gandhi

DHIRAJ KUMAR NATH

UNITED Nations General Assembly has decided recently [15th June 2007 -- 103rd meeting] to observe each year 2nd October as International Day of Non-Violence across the world. The United Nations has called upon all member states and individuals to commemorate the day in a befitting manner and to disseminate the message of non-violence convincingly. The day was selected in recognition of Gandhi's spiritual leadership to propagate Ahimsa or Non-Violence that led to inspire movement for civil right and freedom across the world through the process of non-violence.

The resolution to respect the apostle of humanity and peace adopted by 192 member bodies stressed the need for non-violence, tolerance, full respect for human rights and fundamental freedom for all, democracy, development, mutual understanding and respect for diversity as re-enforcement of peace and growth for mankind. In India, October 2nd, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi is commemorated each year as Gandhi Jayanti, a national holiday.

We may dwell on the life of Mahatma Gandhi for a moment to understand his philosophy and vision. Mahatma Gandhi was born at Porbander, Gujarat, on October 2, 1869 and he was assassinated on January 30, 1948 by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu fundamentalist.

Living with a devout mother and surrounded by Jain influences, Gandhi learned from an early age the tenets of non-injury to living being, vegetarianism, fasting for self-purification and mutual tolerance between members of different faiths, caste and creed. In May 1883, at the age of 13, Gandhi was married through his parent's arrangements to Kasturba Makhanjee and they had four sons. Gandhi was a mediocre student and barely passed the matriculation examination from Samaldas College at Bhavnagar, Gujarat. At the age of 18, September 4, 1888, Gandhi went to University College of London to train himself as a barrister.

On return from London, he started modest living at Rajkot in drafting petitions for litigants. Later,

The crisis, now we find round the world, political thinkers and social reformists believe, is due to the insatiable desire of super powers to dominate poor countries and keep their ego invincible. These mentors of crisis terribly disregard the eastern philosophy of life and undermine the politics of least developed countries.

he accepted a year-long contract from an Indian firm to a post at Natal, South Africa in 1893.

South Africa changed Gandhi dramatically, as he faced the discrimination commonly directed to blacks and Indians. One day in court at Durban, the magistrate asked him to remove his turban. Gandhi refused and stormed out of the courtroom. He was thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg, after refusing to move from the first class to a third class coach while holding a valid first class ticket. Traveling further, he was beaten by a driver for refusing to travel on the foot board to make room for a European passenger. He suffered hardship in different manners, including being debarred from entry into hotels.

All these incidents compelled him to be a political activist. He started to protest with mass support against racism, prejudice and injustice. However, these events, by no means, explain why he pioneered non-violence instead of a violent revolution.

First major achievement of Gandhi was in 1918 with the agitation at Champaran and Kheda Satyagraha. Gandhi led organised protests and strikes against landlords oppressing poor farmers at Kheda in Gujarat and achieved success in favour of peasants. The British had to suspend all revenue collections from farmers and release all prisoners. It was during this agitation in a non-violent manner that Gandhi was addressed by people as Bapu [father]. Rabindranath Tagore used to call him Mahatma. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi became very popular and widely known as great leader all over the country.

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre of civilians by British troops in 1919 generated public anger and acts of violence. Gandhi's emotional speech and declaration of Swaraj (mean complete individual, spiri-

tual and political independence) was a great turn to the history of India during the time.

Gandhi said, "it is contrary to our manhood if we obey laws repugnant to our conscience". His non-cooperation movement enjoyed widespread appeal and success, increasing excitement and participation from all strata of Indian society. Gandhi had to decide differently when violent clash of Chauri-Chaura stirred the nation. Gandhi famously led Indians in the disobedience of the Salt Tax, popularly known as Dandi March in 1930 and his open call for British to Quit India came in 1943. Gandhiji was imprisoned for many years on numerous occasions in South Africa and in India.

Gandhi explained his philosophy and way of life in his autobiography, "My Experiments with Truth". He was quoted as saying:

"An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

"There are many causes that I am prepared to die but no cause that I am prepared to kill for"

"Non-violence is the law of our species, as violence is the law of the brute"

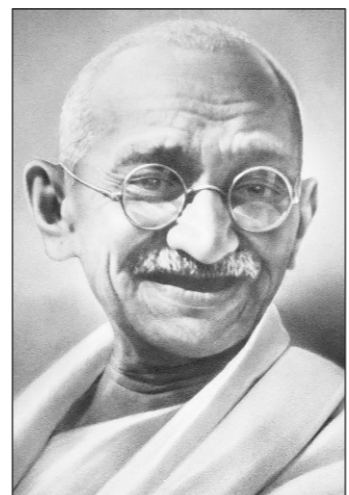
"Science of war leads one to dictatorship pure and simple"

"Science of non-violence can alone lead one to pure democracy"

Albert Einstein pointed out, "the problem of bringing peace to the world on a supra national basis will be solved only by employing Gandhi's method on a large scale".

The Encyclopedia Britannia summarises Gandhi's significance with the statement, "Gandhi was the catalyst if not the initiator of three of the major revolutions of the 20th century, the revolutions against colonisation, racism and violence."

"Non-violence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind." It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by



the ingenuity of man". According to Gandhi, "It is the law of love that rules mankind."

Gandhi once said, the golden way is to be friend with the world and to regard the whole human family as one.

Gandhi's life and teachings obviously inspired Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, Nelson Mandela, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Steve Biko, Benigno SAquino Jr etc.

Mahatma Gandhi was not found eligible for the Nobel peace prize in 1944. Of course, the Nobel committee later on repented that they did a mistake.

The question now arises what prompted the UNGA to decide to commemorate Gandhi's birth day, the 2nd October as the International Day of Non-violence after such a long time? Possibly, during the 20th century, the world witnessed lots of wars, genocides, hostilities, struggles and at least 160 million people died in wars but could not bring any peace or an end to hostilities. "War against terror" might not see the light at the end of the tunnel provided terrorists are not motivated adequately with values of non-violence.

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