

Living in drug zone

FROM PAGE 1
kick on the cheap, they would smoke joint.

Whenever they felt like, they would walk to Karwan Bazar along the rail line. The trains from Jamalpur and Mymensingh would bring in the stuff. But then things started changing in the late 80s. Ershad's regime was coming to an end and there was a lot of political movement. The Jatiya Party was slopping money on the youths, taking them into its fold in the faint hope of quashing any opposing movement.

Suddenly the faces of the innocent fun-loving Peyarabagh youths changed too. Their attires changed. Their behaviour changed, they became arrogant and violent. They were no more the same guys I had known.

After the fall of Ershad in 1990, a new thing added to their daily consumption of cigarettes -- Phensedyl, a cough syrup from India.

The syrup spread fast among the youths and destroyed lives and families. The teenagers bunked schools and colleges and hollered with their parents for money. They would steal from their parents. They would sell their home furniture and valuables. It became a social disaster.

As consumption increased, their health deteriorated. They became disoriented. Many of them dropped dead in their sleep with massive heart attack. That spread the scare.

The younger son of a top political leader would often visit one such adda where Phensedyl would flow freely in 1994. The dark young man would come in a jeep and walk up to the rooftop apartment with a jerry can full with the stuff. He would slowly sip the liquid and leave after finishing two cups of the thing.

One day he passed out while having Phensedyl. That frightened the adda members. This guy was something really big and if something goes wrong with this man, everybody

would be in trouble.

From then, the adda continued but they would avoid the politician's son, who later died abroad.

The drug became so popular that a top leader of a student organisation in the area whose name starts with the letter L had even set up a pseudo-Phensedyl plant in a house in the alley beside the passport office where various chemicals were mixed to produce something they sold as Phensedyl. This trade grew under the supervision of other top godfathers, including Murgi Milon (he was later killed), Auranga (he also got killed in a road crash), Hannan and few others.

After 2005, a new drug entered the area. Suddenly the druggies were all talking about this pink tablet that works wonder to put them high. Some youths started making weekend sorties to Chittagong and Cox's Bazar to bring bagful of the tablets.

The tablet proliferated. Now there was a regular supply chain established. Train running from Chittagong were bringing in loads of the tablets. Cars driven by influential people were carrying the tablets.

Now there were some main dealers in Dhaka in areas like Nayabazar, Mohammadpur, Krishni Market, Gabtoli, Kamalapur and Badda who would bring yaba in bulks in hundreds of thousands of pieces. And there were some sub-dealers for each neighbourhood who would buy from the dealers in thousands. And there were local peddlers who would procure a few hundreds to meet the local needs.

In my area, there were five or six peddlers. Then the drug was uberised. The users themselves turned into sellers.

I saw the youths -- the teenagers, people in their 20s and 30s -- getting hooked to yaba. They would buy 10 yaba pills from the peddlers with the promise that if they could sell 10 of them, they would get one free. And that made good sense and good business. These youths started luring in

more and more people because the more people they could lure into the drug world, the more free tablets they could get for their own consumption.

With yaba, they could share-consume like share ride because when you heat up a yaba tablet it produces smoke which the druggies inhale. One yaba tablet could produce enough smoke for 30 puffs. So two or three youths would sit together, heat up a tablet and all of them would inhale the smoke in turns. That way no smoke is wasted. The most economical use of yaba.

I knew almost everyone of the addicts of my area. I knew who is a peddler and who a user. I knew how they carry the tablets -- inside dummy mobiles. They would remove the battery and put yaba inside at no one's suspicion. I knew them personally and I saw them getting ruined by the drug. I knew a guy who died just within a few months of his marriage. I knew another guy whose wife would buy the yaba for her husband because she would not want him to go out and take the drug. I knew quite a few, some of them sons of rich people who eventually died.

I had been watchful of a kid for some time. I suspected he takes yaba. His tell-tale behaviour made me think like that. One day I point-blank asked him: "Are you into yaba?"

The startled kid vehemently shook his head. "No, uncle. Swear on God. I do not touch it."

Then one night, I was sitting on my rooftop at night. I saw the kid pacing back and forth in the darkness of the alley and talking on the phone. I was curious. After a few calls, the peddler came. I know the peddler very well. The guy quickly pushed something in the boy's hand and vanished as quietly as he had appeared. The boy disappeared too. I sat stunned by the confirmation of my old hunch.

The revelation was too much to take. I drew up a list of 14 yaba sellers

and dealers of my area and gave it to local Rab and police. I saw some raids taking place but that made no difference.

But one day, I was startled by the furious pounding on my door. I peeped through and found a horde of people, wielding sticks and machetes, ruthlessly striking on the door. They were shouting and calling my name.

I called the police who came quickly and the mob left. They were the yaba peddlers and dealers and their men who were infuriated by my list. Obviously somebody in the police leaked it.

Now when I was given the assignment to photograph the trade, I called one druggy-cum-peddler and told him my mission. He said: "Ok. Come to Moghbazar Wireless Gate. I will be there."

He was not there. I called him again. He said he is moving towards Moghbazar intersection. Half an hour later, he was not there. I again called him. This time he was in Malibagh Chowdhurypara.

I found him there, fidgeting with his mobile. He demanded Tk 250 to buy the tablet. I gave him the notes. He went away promising to meet me again the next day.

The next day he again played the same hide-and-seek, and popped up at Chowdhurypara. The first thing he said was he needed another Tk 250. After that we went to an apartment in Peyarabagh. Two more guys were waiting there.

He produced a tablet from inside the mobile set. Then he took out a foil paper from his pocket. He put the tablet on the foil and lit a lighter. As the tablet melted it gave out smoke. Now the guys were in action. They rolled a ten taka note and used it as a pipe to inhale the smoke.

In five minutes time, the whole thing was over. I walked away from the apartment with my camera full of pixels of a pixilated world.

Sabrina said, having watched Nazmul's struggle up close the entire time, "which is why I had to be patient with him, and ask his family to do the same." After that difficult beginning, Nazmul said that it got "easier for him to stay away from the drug." He has been clean for years now and said that "he never wants to touch yaba again."

According to one drug rehabilitation centre in Cox's Bazaar, the number of patients addicted to yaba admitted there went up from being non-existent almost a decade ago, to now about 80 percent. Five other drug rehabilitation centres in Dhaka that The Daily Star spoke to mentioned figures which were nearly identical, showing the scale of the problem and how widespread it is in our society.

Most experts The Daily Star spoke to said that patients addicted to yaba needed to be treated differently because of how the drug affected them. "You need more emphasis on counselling," said Gayen, "whereas heroin affects patients physically more, yaba takes a greater toll on their minds and, therefore, requires a different kind of approach."

Unfortunately, experts also explained that because of the social stigma associated with addiction, many patients don't admit to their addiction until they completely break down mentally and emotionally. It is difficult to treat patients who have reached such a point, although, it not at all impossible, they said.

Another major problem regarding yaba addiction is that there isn't enough social awareness about it. Although people realise that its use has become widespread across society, and that its affects are dangerous, experts agree that these issues are yet to be taken as seriously as they ought to be. They explained that they have never seen an addiction problem as serious as what they have seen with regards to yaba, and that society as a whole, must realise that also.

Additionally, according to SM Rajibul Islam, Chairman of Omega Point Rehabilitation Centre, because the "suicide rate among yaba addicts is so high," their friends and family need to be more understanding and supportive, which many still don't realise. People around them "often give up hope on them," which doesn't help. "It is a disease, and so it has a cure. People need to know this so that they can give patients the courage needed to overcome it."

All experts agree that there has to be concerted effort to tackle yaba addiction among people, especially the young. And that the most important steps can only be talked about and taken, once more awareness is generated across all segments of society concerning a problem that is destroying the lives of countless numbers of young people in our country, as well as their future prospects.

"The names mentioned are pseudonyms and not the real names of the individuals.

Meth epidemic in its birth place



Like Germany, the US and the UK, Japan had supplied pills made of methamphetamine to its soldiers and even factory workers to enable them to work longer hours without eating during the World War II.

Philopon, produced by Dainippon Pharmaceutical Co (now Sumitomo Dainippon Pharma), was used as a pick-me-up during the war for military personnel who needed to stay alert. The name is said to have originated from the Greek word philoponus, which means "he who loves labour," according to a Japan Times report in 2014.

Japan had produced a ton of Philopon pills during the war and it had huge surplus of it after the war. As Japan surrender to the allied forces in 1945, the large military stockpiles of methamphetamine found their way onto the black market, leading to widespread abuse. With society in chaos, drug abuse spread rapidly and emerged as epidemic in Japan.

Plain old methamphetamine was synthesised from ephedrine by Japanese chemist Nagai Nagayoshi in 1893. This was neat, not crystal meth. More than two decades later, in 1919 Akira Ogata, Japanese pharmacologist, performed reduction on ephedrine and created crystal meth.

Both of these chemicals were originally used in nasal decongestants and bronchial inhalers. Methamphetamine has also been used in the treatment of obesity.

But the World War II changed the use of Methamphetamine as it was used in order to help soldiers stay awake and alert to win the war. And this appeared worse as the stockpiles of methamphetamine was made to public after the war.

At its peak in 1954, police reports estimated there were 550,000 addicts in the country, with around 2 million people having tried the drug at some point in their life.

Japan government introduced a comprehensive anti-drug package in the mid-1950s, including stricter laws and huge campaign against substance use. It imposed a ban on raw materials used to produce meth. It resulted in that abuse having been almost totally eradicated by 1957.

But, around 1970 a new wave of abuse, the second epidemic, began. It peaked around 1985, after which abuse tapered off, albeit slowly. A temporary increase in the mid-1990s made Japanese authorities declare the emergence of 'the third epidemic' that is still said to be ongoing.

"Official statistics show, however, that Japan has not seen any such epidemic. In comparison with most other Western countries, methamphetamine abuse in Japan is modest," commented Bert Edstrom, a senior research fellow of Stockholm University, in an article two years ago.

Indonesia church

FROM PAGE 16
rising intolerance towards religious minorities.

The bombers -- a mother and father, two daughters aged nine and 12, and two sons aged 16 and 18 -- were linked to local extremist network Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) which supports IS, said national police chief Tito Karnavian.

Local media reports say they may have returned from Syria, where hundreds of Indonesians have flocked in recent years to fight alongside IS in its bid to carve out a caliphate ruled by strict Islamic law.

The mother, identified as Puji Kuswati, and her two daughters were wearing niqab face veils and had bombs strapped to their waists as they entered the grounds of the Kristen Indonesia Diponegoro Church and blew themselves up, Karnavian said.

The father, JAD cell leader Dita Priyanto, drove a bomb-laden car into the Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church while his sons rode motorcycles into Santa Maria church, where they detonated explosives they were carrying, Karnavian said.

"All were suicide attacks but the types of bombs are different," he said. **COORDINATED ATTACKS**

The group, led by jailed radical Aman Abdurrahman, has been linked to several deadly incidents, including a 2016 gun and suicide attack in the capital Jakarta that left four attackers and four civilians dead.

That was the first assault claimed by IS in Southeast Asia.

Police yesterday said four suspected JAD members were killed in a shoot-out during raids linked to a deadly prison riot this week.

Five members of Indonesia's elite anti-terrorism squad and a prisoner were killed in clashes that saw Islamists inmates take a guard hostage at a high-security jail on the outskirts of Jakarta. IS claimed responsibility.

Karnavian said yesterday's attacks may have been revenge for the arrest of some of JAD's leaders and for the prison crisis which eventually saw the surrender of the radical inmates.

"The incident angered them... and there were instructions from IS in Syria, so they waited for a moment to take revenge," he added.

The Pope offered support over "the severe attack against places of worship", while President Joko Widodo called for Indonesians to "unite against terrorism".

"The state will not tolerate this act of cowardice," he told reporters in Surabaya.

East Java police spokesman Frans Barung Mangera confirmed the deaths of 13 people with about 40 injured in the coordinated attacks at around 7:30 am.

Images showed a vehicle engulfed in flames and plumes of thick black smoke as a body lay outside the gate of Santa Maria Catholic church, with motorcycles toppled over amid the mangled debris.

In addition to the suicide blast police experts defused two unexploded bombs at the Surabaya Centre Pentecostal Church.

Nearly 90 percent of Indonesia's 260 million people are Muslim, but there are significant numbers of Christians, Hindus and Buddhists.

Concerns about sectarian intolerance have been on the rise, with churches targeted in the past.

Police shot and wounded an IS-inspired radical who attacked a church congregation outside Indonesia's cultural capital Yogyakarta with a sword during a Sunday mass in February. Four people were injured.

In 2000 bombs disguised as Christmas gifts delivered to churches and clergymen killed 19 people on Christmas Eve and injured scores more across the country.

ISLAMIC MILITANCY
The archipelago nation of some 17,000 islands has long struggled with Islamic militancy, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people -- mostly foreign tourists -- in the country's worst-ever terror attack.

Yesterday's bombings had the highest death toll since nine people were killed in 2009 attacks on two luxury hotels in Jakarta.

Security forces have arrested hundreds of militants during a sustained crackdown in recent years that smashed some networks, and most recent attacks have been low-level and targeted domestic security forces.

But the coordinated nature of yesterday's bombings suggested a higher level of planning, analysts said.

"Recent (previous) attacks have been far less 'professional'," Sidney Jones, an expert on Southeast Asian terrorism and director of the Jakarta-based Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, told AFP.

Source of sickness

FROM PAGE 1
He started buying yaba using money he got from his relatives as gifts, or for getting good grades in school. Once that money ran out and his consumption increased, Abir started to lie to his family to get money to buy the drug. As his consumption increased further, he resorted to stealing from home until he was caught by his family. "I never lied or stole after that," he said. But simply asked his family to give him the money ever since, which they did.

"My addiction caused a lot of problems at home. My relationships with others started to break down or got strained. It changed my way of living, my lifestyle, and I started to think differently as the drug took over my life. I stopped participating in normal activities that are supposed make you feel good," Abir lamented, saying that he couldn't derive any pleasure from doing them anymore because of the effects of the drug. "Yaba changes the way you think to the point where you lose your mental balance." Thus, it also severely affected Abir's education. "I felt angry, depressed and frustrated without any reason, it ruined so many things about my life."

Despite wanting to quit, his attempts to give up yaba failed as dealers kept calling Abir or leaving him missed calls every time he tried, just to remind him that he could get the drug any time he wanted. "When dealers realised I had money, they started to leave about 100-200 pills with me every few days, and once, more than 600 even. I kept taking them and dealers would call me later to ask for the money and I even had to give a dealer my guitar once as payment. My addiction completely isolated me from everyone," Abir said, expressing his desire still to overcome his addiction.

Sohel* too was once addicted to yaba. His family, once they learned about it, sent him to a rehabilitation centre which he hated, tried to escape from, and eventually left in anger. "The first thing they do there is shave your head. They pressurise you to work to a point that he didn't like," his mother said. "We later sent him to another centre and he actually liked it there. The main difference was that people there were kind and encouraging. That gave him hope."

Sohel eventually was able to overcome his addiction. And although he barely talks about his experience anymore, not wanting to recall those dark times, he later told his mother that the most important factor was his desire to quit. "Why did I even go to rehabilitation?" Sohel asked. "I could've quit on my own if I really wanted to, and I did. All I needed was the willingness to give it up. But when you are on it, you find one excuse after another for yourself, to convince yourself and others that you cannot quit because of this reason or that," Sohel would say, according to her.

But trying to quit on your own may not always be possible. According to Tarun Gayen, chief executive of CREA Drug Addiction Treatment Centre in

Dhaka, around 5-10 percent of patients receiving treatment at the centre were diagnosed with psychotic problems. Other rehabilitation centres also said the same, although the percentage did vary; but not by much.

And Sohel too had similarly suffered. "He started to put scotch tape on the fridge to try to cover up parts of it. He said it was shocking him from time to time, broke his phone saying that it was watching him, talking to him, saying bad things," explained his mother. It was then that his family took him to a rehabilitation centre where, to the surprise of everyone, he seemed completely normal. "We had to explain how he had acted before to the doctors as he demonstrated no sign such odd behaviour in front of them. Fortunately, everything worked out eventually, and he has now fully recovered."

One of the most important factors in his recovery was to avoid the types of

tainted or not, but it was nothing like I had ever taken before -- completely different."

Nazmul said he still can't recall parts of that experience -- but it lasted for nearly two days and he started to do it more regularly after that. Though a scary experience, he didn't really take it as seriously as he later would, when he saw the effects of yaba gripping his friends to the point where "their behaviour was nearly unrecognisable."

"They started to act very strangely with me, kept telling me how I am addicted when they did it much more than me. I thought it was because they cared, but then they became suspicious, I don't even know about what, they started to treat me differently, as if they didn't even know me. This really hurt me and made me want to do the drug more, which I did, alone. Later I realised it was the drug that was making them act that way. It affects your mental stability by making you anx-

YABA EFFECTS	
SOME EFFECTS INCLUDE	EFFECTS OF CHRONIC ABUSE INCLUDE
➤ Euphoria	➤ Tremors
➤ Insomnia	➤ Hypertension
➤ Irritability and aggression	➤ Hallucinations
➤ Decreased appetite and nausea	➤ Psychotic episodes
➤ Hot flashes, dry mouth, and sweating	➤ Paranoid delusions
➤ Damage to the small blood vessels in the brain	➤ Violent behavior
➤ Increased alertness, wakefulness, and physical activity	➤ Hyperthermia and convulsions
➤ Increased heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, and body temperature	➤ Agitation, anxiety, and nervousness
	➤ Mental confusion and memory loss
	➤ Psychosis similar to schizophrenia (characterized by paranoia, picking at the skin, self absorption, and visual and auditory hallucinations)

SOURCE: CENTRE FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESEARCH, US

environment that could once again push him down that dark and destructive path. And he has been trying his best to do that especially by avoiding people who take the drug, including some of his old friends.

This was also key to Nazmul* staying clean at first, once he had finally decided to quit the drug some years ago. "When I first decided not to do yaba, it seemed like an impossible task. My friend Sabrina* encouraged me not to hang out with others who were doing the drug, that was very important."

Nazmul never did the drug as regularly as his other friends with whom he had started, but he did take yaba for nearly three years. "I did it occasionally for the first two years, how many times a month varied, but I am sure I did not do it more than 10 times in any one month."

He even fully stopped for nearly a month and a half after those two years, when in just one day, everything changed. "I did it again with the intent of doing it just once when a friend said he had some really good yaba pills. I still don't know whether they were

ious; it isn't called the 'mad drug' for no reason."

At this point, Nazmul's family started to become very suspicious when his friend, Sabrina, came to his rescue. "She knew everything but gave me my space until then. When she realised things were worsening she intervened, when I had no one else to confide in." Nazmul only spent time with Sabrina for the next month out of all his friends, especially to avoid relapse.

"It wasn't because all my friends were addicted to yaba, although many were, but she was the only one who knew how to deal with me, take care of me, during that difficult beginning. And it wasn't only like I was trying to stay away from the drug itself, but I had to give up many things about my life altogether which made it much more difficult."

The kindness and support he received from her at first, and his family later on, was what "saved" him, Nazmul explained. "That is what you need if you want to quit yaba as it can easily overwhelm you emotionally, and even how your brain functions,"