

# Dope, Inc.'s Afghan harvest

by Ramtanu Maitra

The latest figures from the International Narcotics Control Board, published by the United Nations for 1995, and the *Supply of Illicit Drugs to the United States*, published in 1995 by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), show that during 1994-95, cultivated illicit opium production in Afghanistan was about 2,300 tons, about one-third less than in crop year 1993-94. The decrease is attributed to large-scale eradication, lower prices because of overproduction in 1993-94, and increased cultivation cost.

Some of the drop in production was also caused by the effective border control and the fight against drug trafficking by both Iran and Pakistan during 1994-95. Illicit opium production, however, shows a rise in the northeastern Afghan province of Badakshan bordering Tajikistan. The United Nations report attributes this increase to the emerging new trafficking and opening up of fresh routes through neighboring members of the Community of Independent States (CIS) of Central Asia.

Today the "Taliban interlude," during which it was reported that the religious believers belonging to the movement were involved in curbing poppy growing, has come to a halt, and a new surge of trafficking is expected from the region.

The CIS member states in Central Asia, Gorno-Badakshan in southeastern Tajikistan, Penjikent (at the Tajik-Kyrgyz border), Taldy-Kurgan and Kazyl-Orda (both in southern Kazakhstan), and the Samarkand area in central Uzbekistan are fast becoming major poppy-growing areas. One estimate claims that the Chu River valley in Kazakhstan and the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan can produce as much opium and hashish as that produced around the world now.

In Central Asia, poppy growing is still done in smaller plots. In 1994, some 400 hectares of illicit poppy were eradicated in Penjikent, and "Operation Mak" in northern Tajikistan resulted in the seizure of some 200 tons of opium and cannabis resin and in the arrest of dozens of well-armed drug gangs. The government of Uzbekistan has continued with its manual poppy eradication program (known as the "Black Poppy" operations), resulting in eradication on average of 150 tons of opium poppy plants and 25 tons of cannabis plants per year.

Meanwhile, another CIS member-nation, Georgia, is turning fast into a major poppy-growing country.

In the 1980s, when Washington was leaning on Pakistan heavily to become the major cog in its Afghan war machine, and lavishly dumping aid on Pakistan and the government of its military dictator Gen. Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, heroin-manufacturing labs began to crop up all along the Durand Line which separates Pakistan from Afghanistan. In an interview, General Zia himself admitted that about 19 heroin labs were converting opium into heroin on the Pakistani side of the border.

As long the Soviets were in Afghanistan, most of the Afghan opium and heroin would find its way into Pakistan and then through various smuggling networks transit through India and Nepal into the West. However, the scene has changed since. A recent news report from Alma Ata, the Kazakhstan capital, by André Grabot of the Agence France Presse, is an eye-opener. He pointed out that the new drug routes, alternatives to the well-known outlets of Karachi or the Makrana coast, are along the narrow and winding tracks over the Pamir Mountain range in Tajikistan used by caravans and herdsmen. In certain places, the caravan climbs over

MAP 18

## Poppy-growing areas in Central Asia



MAP 19

**Known heroin laboratories in Central Asia**



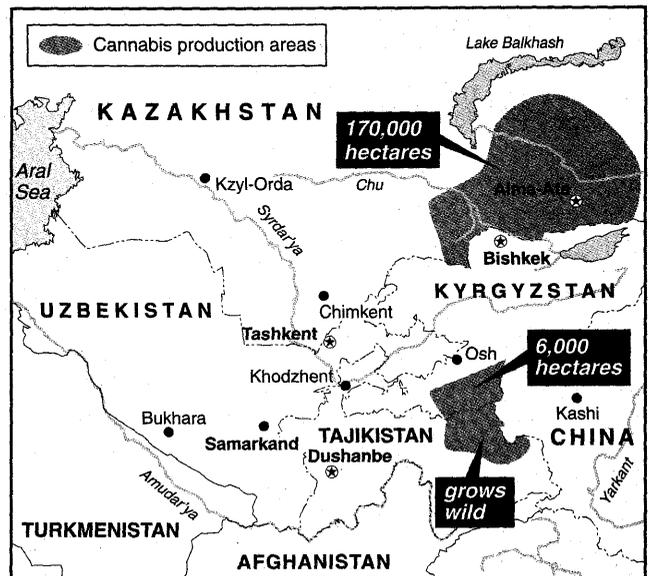
6,000 meters on its way to Moscow en route to the West.

The caravan stops at Osh, the second largest city in Kyrgyzstan, and now a major hub of drugs coming in from Afghanistan and Tajikistan, as well as from local production. Osh is located deep in the Fergana Valley on the border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In Kyrgyzstan, to the north of Tajikistan, the drug trade is growing by leaps and bounds. According to Kyrgyz Interior Ministry statistics, in 1991, police seized just 3.5 kilos of opium and 5 kilos the following year; but in 1993 the haul shot up to 153 kilos, and in 1994 the seizure crossed the one-ton barrier.

However, these seizures are not even a drop in the bucket compared to the sea of poppy growing now in progress in the region. Western diplomats report that the road between Tashkent and Samarkand in Uzbekistan goes between the mountains, the sides of which have been cultivated. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has also identified the Central Asian states within the CIS as major poppy-growing regions. The DEA says the Central Asian officials do not have statistics on the extent of the cultivation.

MAP 20

**Marijuana and hashish production areas in Central Asia**



**Key to Map 20**

- About 170,000 hectares in Kazakhstan produce cannabis
- About 6,000 hectares in Kyrgyzstan produce cannabis
- Cannabis grows wild in Tajikistan

On the manufacturing end, the reports indicate the following:

- Traffickers from Afghanistan are shipping metric-ton quantities of morphine base by maritime vessels and overland through Central Asia to Turkey for further processing into heroin.

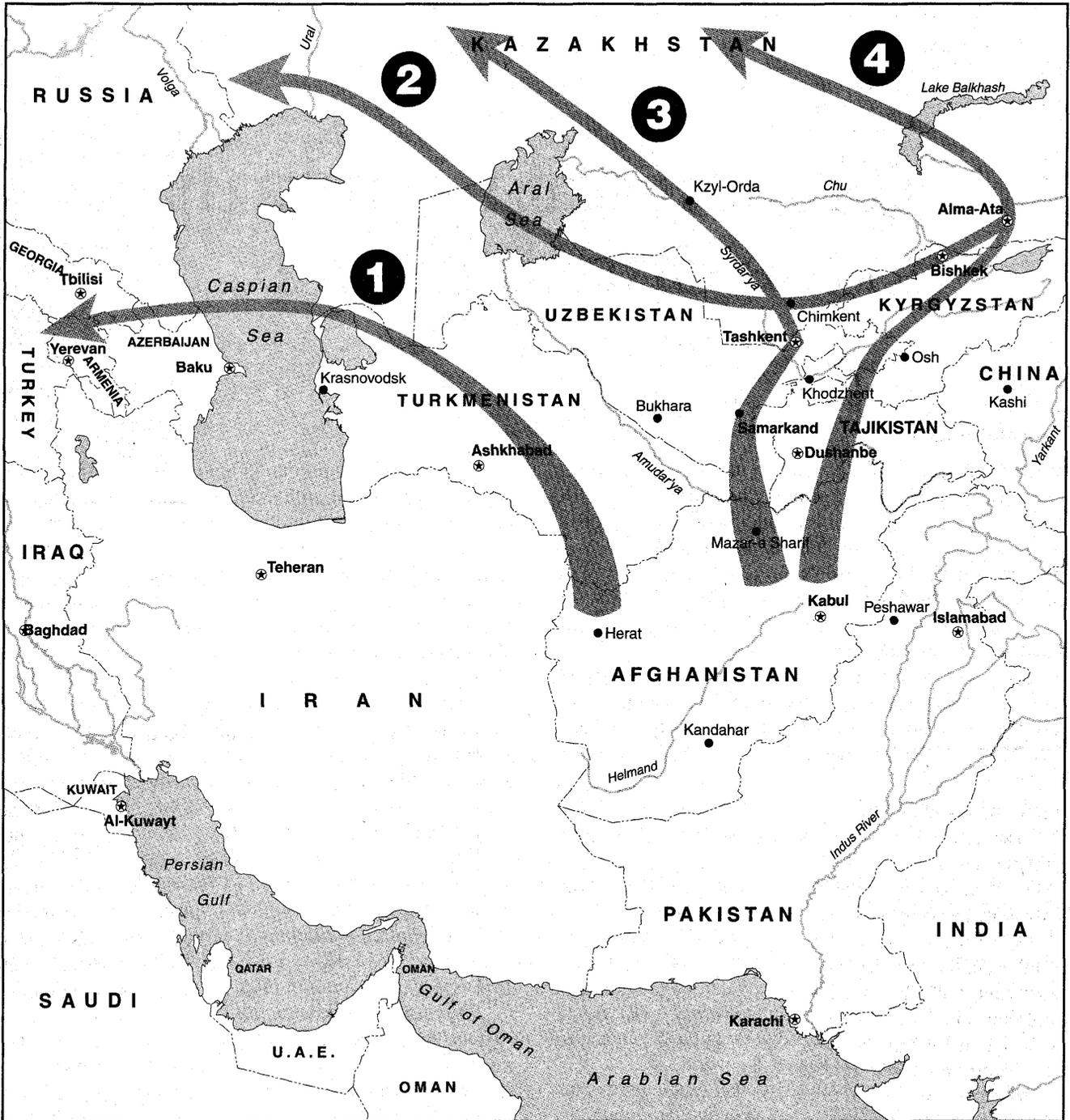
- While most of the acetic anhydride used to make heroin by the laboratory operators is smuggled into Pakistan from India, Kazakhstan is emerging as a major manufacturer of acetic anhydride and there are reports of the chemical traveling to clandestine heroin-manufacturing labs located along the Afghanistan-Tajikistan borders.

- The DEA report indicates that opiate processing has increased during 1994-95 in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. There are indications that heroin laboratory activity increased, possibly to supply traffickers using routes through Central Asia and Russia.

- Many laboratories are located in the northern part of Afghanistan, in close proximity to its borders with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. For the supply of acetic anhydride, these labs depend on Kazakhstan.

- Finally, the United Nations report says that in Afghanistan, clandestine heroin laboratories are on the increase.

**Heroin and opium trail through Central Asia**



**Key to Map 21**

**Route 1:** Opium, mostly from Herat, Afghanistan to Turkey, for processing into heroin.

**Route 2:** Heroin from northern Afghanistan and Tajikistan to western Europe through Estonia and Latvia.

**Route 3:** Heroin from northern Afghanistan transported through Tashkent, Uzbekistan to western Europe, via Moscow and Tallinn, Estonia. This route feeds Chechnya as well.

**Route 4:** Heroin from northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan to western Europe via St. Petersburg.