



Afghanistan Drug Fears

Fears that Afghanistan may become one of the largest opium producing countries in the area following the Russian withdrawal have been voiced at a conference in Pakistan attended by senior AFP officers.

"Opium production continued in Afghanistan despite the recent intensive fighting there, and there is concern local people may increase production as a way out of economic difficulties," Assistant Commissioner (Investigations) Peter Lamb told *Platypus*.

Mr Lamb attended the International Conference on Narcotic Law Enforcement in Karachi between March 20-25.

Other members of the Australian delegation were the AFP's Liaison Officer in Thailand, Superintendent Steve Polden, and the senior LO from Pakistan, Superintendent Joe McKirdy.

The UN-sponsored conference was called by Pakistan's Prime Minister, Ms Benazir Bhutto, who impressed Assistant Commissioner Lamb.

"Ms Bhutto clearly is determined to act against the drug trade and she called the conference when she took office so that the attitude of her administration would be on the record," he said.

"Ms Bhutto is putting a lot of emphasis on the war against drugs and has beefed up the Pakistan Narcotic Control Board. There's help from outside as well because the UN and the US are doing a lot in the field of crop substitution for the country's farmers."

Assistant Commissioner Lamb said Ms Bhutto showed courage in coming out openly against Pakistan's powerful drug interests.

"Threats were made to blow up the conference venue in Karachi — apparently by major drug traffickers — and the conference had to be protected by armed guards. There were also quite violent civil disturbances in Karachi at the time."

Assistant Commissioner Lamb also paid tribute to the AFP's LO's in Pakistan — Superintendent McKirdy and Sergeant Marzio Da Re — pointing out that they were very active

officers, despite working under quite difficult conditions.

The Golden Crescent

Officers engaged in the war against drugs refer to the region as the "Golden Crescent" — North West Pakistan, Afghanistan and India — where impoverished farmers and criminal syndicates produce some of the world's biggest illicit opium crops.



Assistant Commissioner Peter Lamb.

"I visited the famous North West Frontier area a couple of years ago," Assistant Commissioner Lamb said, "where tribal people often don't recognise the authority of central government. It is certainly an area anybody would find hard to police."

He said the conference, attended by delegates from a wide range of countries, had been extremely valuable because it had produced a lot of goodwill internationally.

Problem Seen

"It was one of the few conferences I have been to in the last few years where everybody was very frank and open. The countries where opium is produced all acknowledged that they have drug problems of their own and that they are not just the producers for drug addicts elsewhere."

"All the nations represented — and particularly those where the drugs are produced — pledged the commitment of more resources and better co-operation to help combat the drug trade," he said.

The production of illicit drugs around the world is running at record levels and Australia is increasingly becoming a target for international drug dealers.

"Seventy percent of the heroin used in Australia comes from South East Asia, 20 percent from South West Asia and 10 percent from Lebanon," Assistant Commissioner Lamb explained.

"Illicit drug production in all those areas is increasing this year as a result of bigger plantings and better growing conditions. In the Golden Triangle area of South East Asia it is estimated that opium production will reach 23,000 tonnes this year — a record amount."

"In South West Asia an increase of 200 tonnes in opium production is expected this year to take the total to 1,400 tonnes. It should also be borne in mind that both South West Asia and the Middle East have diversified drug production and are also notorious for hashish, hashish oil and quality marijuana."

Cocaine Production

"In South America the production of coca leaves for cocaine is expected to increase by about 3,000 tonnes to a total of 200,000 tonnes."

Assistant Commissioner Lamb said illicit drug seizures in Australia were increasing markedly.

"Thirty kilogrammes of heroin were seized in 1986 and the total seizures had jumped to 96.5 kilogrammes by 1988. So far this year the level of seizures has already reached 89 kilogrammes," he said.

He expressed concern at the possible effect on Australia on the huge increase in coca leaf production in South America.

"More than 60 percent of all the illicit drugs produced in the world are consumed in the United States. The market for cocaine in the United States is almost saturated now. Our intelligence tells us that Australia is becoming a much bigger target for the cocaine cartels which are looking for new markets."

"We expect those cartels to be pushing for new markets much more aggressively," he said.