

# DRUGS WAR

**MANAMA:** Bahrain has called in international help to combat a massive surge in drug smuggling and abuse.

Cannabis seized in Bahrain soared from 7.4kg in 2000 to 809kg in 2004, according to figures released yesterday.

Heroin seized soared from 1.3kg in 2000 to

By **SOMAN BABY**

11.2kg in 2003 and 9.6kg in 2004.

But officials fear this is only the tip of the iceberg.

They say drug addicts in Bahrain number around 20,000, though only 3,200 are officially registered under the country's rehabilitation programme.

It is estimated that 1,000 heroin users could consume 18.25kg a year.

The government has sought help from the

United Nations Organisation for Drug and Crime in fighting the menace.

Interior Minister Shaikh Rashid bin Abdulla Al Khalifa has signed a \$535,600 (BD202,457) contract with the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

UN experts will support Bahrain with training and other assistance, said UNDP programme analyst Shaikha Hessa bint Khalifa Al Khalifa.

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## New push to combat Aids

### By SOMAN BABY

A MAJOR campaign to combat the killer disease Aids will be launched soon by Bahrain's health authorities with the support of the United Nations.

A media campaign and training of religious leaders will be undertaken under a country programme signed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) with the government.

Several surveys have been completed in preparation to the campaigns, said UNDP programme analyst Ali Salman.

The project is part of a \$1 million (BD378,000) technical co-operation agreement between UNDP and the Health Ministry, he told the GDN.

It aims at controlling non-communicable diseases, hereditary blood diseases, and HIV Aids.

The Aids prevention programme targets three groups, said Mr Salman.

They are the injection drug

(ID) users, pregnant women and the youth.

Thirteen interviewers have been trained by a UNDP expert and have already interviewed hundreds of youth in the age group of 16 to 24, pregnant women aged 15 to 45 and ID users of all ages, he said.

"The findings of the survey are currently being analysed," said Mr Salman.

"Based on the results, we shall undertake several awareness campaigns to get the message across to the public.

"These will include a series of media campaigns to educate people, especially those at risk, on how to prevent the disease."

Mr Salman said that six religious leaders would be sent to Egypt on a training programme in November.

"The leaders belong to different sects, including a Christian religious scholar," he added.

"We understand the important role religious leaders can play in preventing Aids through their messages."

National Aids Committee chairwoman Dr Sumaiya Al Jowder said the survey among pregnant women revealed that many had a misconception on the mode of transmission of Aids.

"They believed that the virus is transmitted through mosquitoes," she said.

"We have to educate them that Aids virus is transmitted mainly through sexual contacts, sharing of needles between addicts, and from an infected pregnant mother to the child."

Dr Al Jowder said a behavioural study revealed that people still stigmatised Aids carriers and refused to eat with them.

She said according to the latest ministry study, there are 102 Aids carriers and 25 Aids patients under treatment in Bahrain. About half of them are ID users.

Dr Al Jowder said about 100 Bahrainis died from Aids or its complications over the past 20 years.