

Egypt says cheap new drug 'Strox' threatens its youth

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Tue, 2018-11-20 15:03

CAIRO: For years, Mostafa Mahmoud struggled to pay for his expensive drug addiction, spending much of his meagre income on hashish. A few months ago, he switched to a cheaper way to get high which he says is pushing him to his death.

The 27-year-old man is among a growing number of Egyptians using Strox, a potent narcotic that is mixed with tobacco and smoked, and that Egyptian officials see as one of the biggest threats to the country's young population.

Drug addiction has long been a problem in Egypt, the most populous country in the Arab world with nearly 100 million. But the speed at which Strox use is spreading has posed a new challenge.

Experts say the drug is made in local workshops by adding chemicals often used by veterinarians to a herb like marjoram. Some add pesticides for greater impact, but effectively make the drug more deadly.

Users describe painful convulsions leading to hallucinations and loss of consciousness.

Authorities say the drug has killed dozens of people and has caused a spike in crime.

"It is cheaper than hashish, but when you smoke it you choke, pass out and suffer cramps," said Mahmoud, who lost his job at a fruit shop due to his drug habit.

While the price for one hashish joint was 50 Egyptian pounds (\$2.80), he said two Strox joints cost 30 pounds.

It is spreading in impoverished areas, where living standards have plunged since a 2016 IMF-backed reforms package forced currency devaluation and cut state subsidies. Many victims are aged 15 to 20, according to Amr Othman, director of the state-run drug rehabilitation fund.

While statistics are scarce, officials say some 104,000 drug addicts were receiving free treatment at a rehabilitation center run by the ministry of social solidarity.

Of those, about 25 percent are Strox addicts, officials said, up from 4.5 percent last year.

The number of arrests is also up. Over the past six months, the number of Strox-related arrests soared by 300 percent, and Strox addicts have surged to 40 percent of total drug users in Egypt from 9 percent of the total at the start of the year, according to a security source estimate.

Experts say Strox is a type of synthetic narcotic like those that spread in Western nations more than a decade ago.

"Some are 100 times more potent than others," said Justice Tettey, chief of the laboratory and scientific section at the United Nations Office on Drugs

and Crime in Egypt.

"The frightening part is not that it's more potent than cannabis," he said. "It's that most people have no idea what they're taking. Your first one or next one could be your last one," he added.

"I don't know why I use it. It is awful," Mahmoud said, describing waking up after one session to find a friend had died in his sleep from an overdose. Mahmoud and his friends were held for a few months but later freed without charge.

Recognizing the threat, authorities in September banned the unlicensed sale of chemicals used to make Strox.

Othman said the decision came due to combined efforts by the ministries of health, justice and interior.

Authorities have also enlisted the country's mosques, devoting a Friday sermon to rally Muslims against drugs.

"Just as we are in a comprehensive fight against terrorism, we need a quick and comprehensive battle against addiction and drugs," the sermon said.

"Drugs are another kind of terrorism."

(\$1 = 17.8600 Egyptian pounds)





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Egyptian enthusiasts get American wrestling off the ground

[Iraq launches air strikes against Daesh in Syria](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1542717686260608300

Tue, 2018-11-20 12:37

BAGHDAD: Iraq launched an air strike on an Daesh target inside neighboring Syria on Tuesday, its military said on Monday.

F-16 fighter jets destroyed a building where members of the ultra-hard-line

Sunni militant group were storing weapons, killing 10 of them, the Iraqi military said in a statement.

A second air strike destroyed a building housing 30 Daesh fighters, the statement said.



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[Lebanese foreign ministry: will stand by Carlos Ghosn](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Tue, 2018-11-20 12:03

BEIRUT: Lebanon's foreign ministry said on Tuesday it would stand by Nissan and Renault boss Carlos Ghosn, who is of Lebanese descent and holds Lebanese citizenship, a day after his arrest in Japan on financial misconduct allegations.

Ghosn, one of the best-known leaders in the car industry, was arrested after Nissan Motor Co. said he had engaged in wrongdoing, including personal use of company money and under-reporting how much he was earning for years. The Japanese carmaker plans to remove him as chairman this week.

France moved on Tuesday to oust Ghosn from the helm of Renault but sought to defend the carmaker's alliance with Nissan, which has been rocked by the scandal..

Lebanon's caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil has asked the ambassador in Tokyo to meet with Ghosn and follow up on the case, the ministry said in a statement.

"Carlos Ghosn is a Lebanese citizen who represents one of the Lebanese successes abroad and the Lebanese foreign ministry will stand by him in his adversity to ensure he gets a fair trial," it said. Ghosn, who has Lebanese roots, was born in Brazil and is also French citizen.



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Ghosn's arrest casts doubt on future of Renault-Nissan alliance
Nissan chairman Ghosn arrested, to be dismissed by company

[US cuts in Palestinian refugee aid mitigated by new pledges](#)

Author:

Associated Press

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1542658453705280800

Mon, 2018-11-19 (All day)

JORDAN: The UN agency for Palestinian refugees says it has nearly closed its funding gap after securing new donor pledges to make up for US aid cuts. Pierre Kraehenbuehl, the head of the UN Relief and Works Agency, said Monday that the shortfall was reduced from \$446 million to \$21 million, singling out donors from Europe and the Gulf region.

He says the agency no longer faces the “critical situation” created by a US decision earlier this year to cut nearly \$300 million of aid.

The agency provides health care, education and social services to 5.4 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The agency was created after the mass displacement of Palestinians during the 1948 war over Israel’s creation.



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Trump aid cuts embolden Israel but hurt peace prospects: Analysts
Across the Mideast, Palestinians brace for Trump aid cuts

[Airbnb to remove listings in West Bank settlements](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2018-11-19 15:44

JERUSALEM: Home-renting company Airbnb Inc. said on Monday that it had decided to remove its listings in Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, enclaves that most world powers consider illegal for taking up land where Palestinians seek statehood.

A statement on Airbnb's website said: "We concluded that we should remove listings in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank that are at the core of the dispute between Israelis and Palestinians."

It did not say when the decision, which according to Airbnb affects some 200 listings, would take effect.



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Paris official seeks to outlaw Airbnb rentals in city center
Palestinians in West Bank strike over Israel's nation law