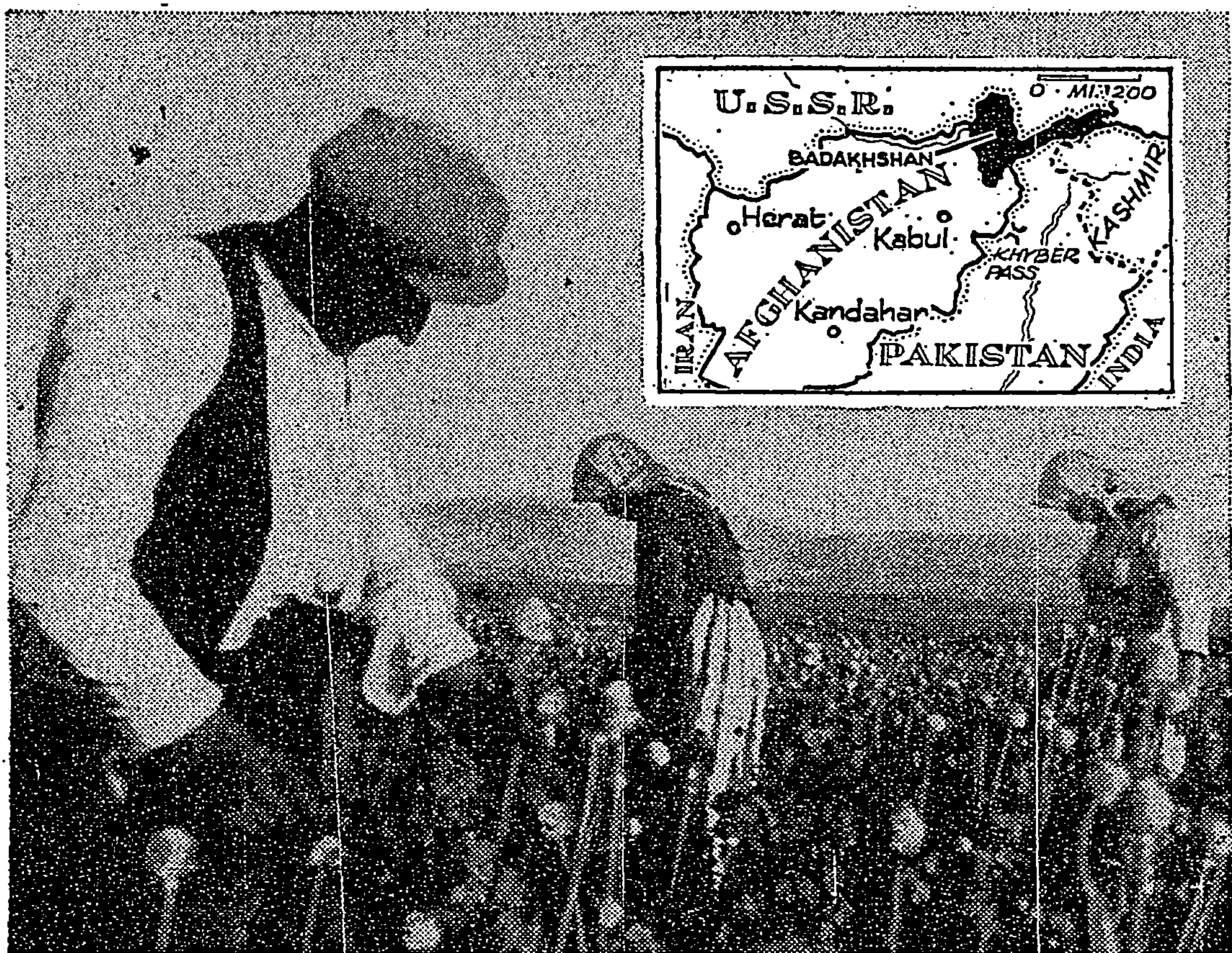


Fate of Afghan Opium Growers Challenges U. N.



The farmers of Badakhshan Province, in the mountains of Afghanistan (see inset map) traditionally have supported themselves by raising poppies and exporting the opium derived from the flower pods. The Technical Assistance Program of the United Nations is confronted with the problem of finding substitute crops to save the people from poverty.



The New York Times
Dr. Abdul Hakim Tabibi, Afghanistan spokesman, announced that his country had made illegal the cultivation, export, use or sale of opium in all forms.

GROWING BAN HITS ONE-CROP REGION

Roadless Badakshan Calls for Help to Develop New Means of Livelihood

By KATHLEEN McLAUGHLIN
Special to The New York Times.

UNITED NATIONS, N. Y., June 15—In the rocky, mountainous province of Badakhshan in Afghanistan, the Technical Assistance Program of the United Nations faces one of its sharpest challenges. There 100,000 persons, prohibited by law from growing the opium that has sustained them and their ancestors for centuries, are threatened with destitution.

Unless the loss of revenue from the highly remunerative opium crop can be at least partially offset, the mountaineers must undergo a recurrence of the miseries they endured during a previous ban. Imposed in 1944, it was lifted in 1946 by the Afghanistan Government in recognition of their extreme poverty.

The present situation arose when Afghanistan notified the Narcotics Commission of the United Nations at its May session in Geneva that she was dropping her three-year plea to be recognized as one of the countries permitted to export opium. Dr. Abdul Hakim Tabibi, the Afghanistan spokesman, announced that his country had re-enacted in April, from "humanitarian interests," the ban on the cultivation, export, use or sale of opium.

Outside Aid Held Essential

The action was taken, Dr. Tabibi emphasized, in full awareness that the people of Badakshan would again be plunged into hardship unless they got speedy aid through emergency development plans, largely through United Nations Technical Assistance resources. His Government already is so extensively committed to the financing of large projects that it has had to seek foreign loans, he said, and can offer only a modicum of relief.

At each meeting of the Narcotics Commission since 1955 Dr. Tabibi has told of the predicament involving Badakshan and its population. The facts were verified for the commission at the recent session in a report by its executive secretary, Gilbert Yates, who visited Afghanistan in March at the invitation of the Government.

Mr. Yates described an isolated area of extreme elevation and severe climate, separated by mountain ranges not yet crossed by roads, and cut up into valleys, usually narrow and often stony but with many fertile strips. The Koksha River cuts across the central part, through a series of deep, boulder-strewn gorges. Only one passable road leads out into the rest of the country.

This road is rough and winding, Mr. Yates said, with thirty to forty locally built bridges, apt to collapse under the rush of seasonal torrents. They must be repaired by near-by villagers. At other points the river must be forded the year round.

With no usable airfields available, all goods imported or exported must be carried by pack animals or on the backs of men and women. Marketing is therefore difficult except for such a product as opium, which returns large earnings for a small volume and is easily transportable.

Export Rights Limited

On the world market legally exported opium ranges in price from \$25,000 to \$50,000 a ton. Badakshan's output was twenty to twenty-five tons a year. Only seven countries, Bulgaria, Greece, India, Iran, Turkey, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia—have been approved as exporters of the drug to fill global needs for medical purposes. Afghanistan's plea for recognition was designed to keep the Badakshan population solvent.

Mr. Yates reported a cooperative attitude among the provincial leaders with whom he discussed the situation. They themselves submitted a list of possible alternative industries and projects that might help them to become self-supporting

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and to avoid catastrophe. They included sericulture (silk raising); weaving; a carpet industry; marketing of dried fruit; animal husbandry and the development of highways, irrigation, mining and electricity.

An important facet of the problem is the relatively scant return to be expected from substitute crops such as wheat or barley. Iran, which has also prohibited the cultivation and use of opium and is receiving technical assistance for the farmers affected, has reported that the income from opium was \$285 an acre, while wheat brings only about \$70 an acre.

Advisers in Afghanistan, including United Nations representatives there, suggested to Mr. Yates that pistachio nuts, asafoetida, cumin (caraway seeds), and rauwolfia, all of which grow wild and abundantly in Badakshan, might be adapted as substitute crops. Good results might be expected, he felt, if the problem of transport could be eased.

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