

Iran to launch crackdown on drug addicts

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LONDON, November 23 (IranMania) - Iran is to arrest drug addicts and send them to rehabilitation camps in a bid to clean up the urban centres that are home to the country's estimated 2 mln and 500 thousand drug users, Iran's Justice Minister said, according to AFP.

"Addicts are criminals; this is a serious warning to them to kick the habit before they are arrested," said Jamal Karimi Rad at his weekly press briefing.

"It has been requested by the citizens and the Islamic community must not have an obscene appearance," he said.

Iran adopted a more relaxed attitude to drug users under the reformist government of former president Mohammad Khatami, regarding them as "criminals who need to be healed" instead of locked up, AFP noted.

Faced with soaring HIV infections, the NGOs and government-funded clinics were set up to provide the addicts with clean needles and the heroin substitute methadone to help them quit.

Independent NGOs like the **Narcotics Anonymous**, set up in Iran in the mid-1990s, have been tolerated with the 30,000-strong group membership holding meetings outdoors in many Iranian towns and cities, AFP stated.

Lying on the crossroads of a major narcotics route from Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran has been battling smugglers, who are executed if arrested with more than five kilos of drugs, and lost thousands of its forces in battles with traffickers.

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