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Afghanistan:

Poppy Ban a Propaganda Ploy

Mullah Omar's ban late last month on opium poppy cultivation for the 2000-01 season is an effort to shift the onus for narcotics eradication onto the international community.

most Taliban leaders, some of whom are involved in the narcotics business, do not view Omar's decree as serious,

-- Omar announced the ban because he was concerned that Pakistan might close the border.

-- *Previous Taliban efforts to shut down the drug trade have been deceptions designed to bring in foreign aid funds.*

The Taliban would be hard pressed to replace the lost tax income—estimated at over \$74 million last year—and would risk losing political support among traffickers who provide the government with financial and material backing for the war with the Northern Alliance. Traffickers holding the Taliban responsible for economic losses suffered as a result of the decree,

-- Iran has offered financial help to offset Afghan farmers' losses from giving up poppy cultivation,

-- Taliban representatives in Islamabad last week that it is up to the international community to provide assistance to Afghan farmers.

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