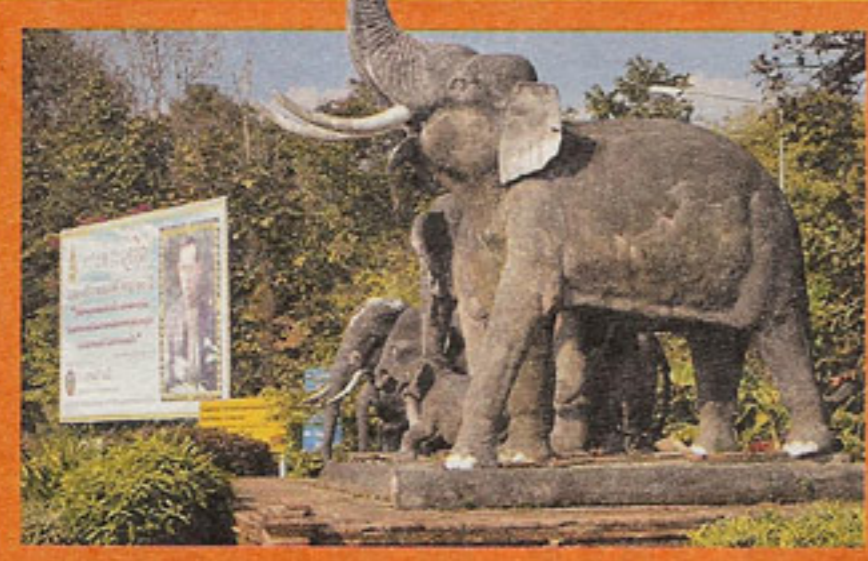
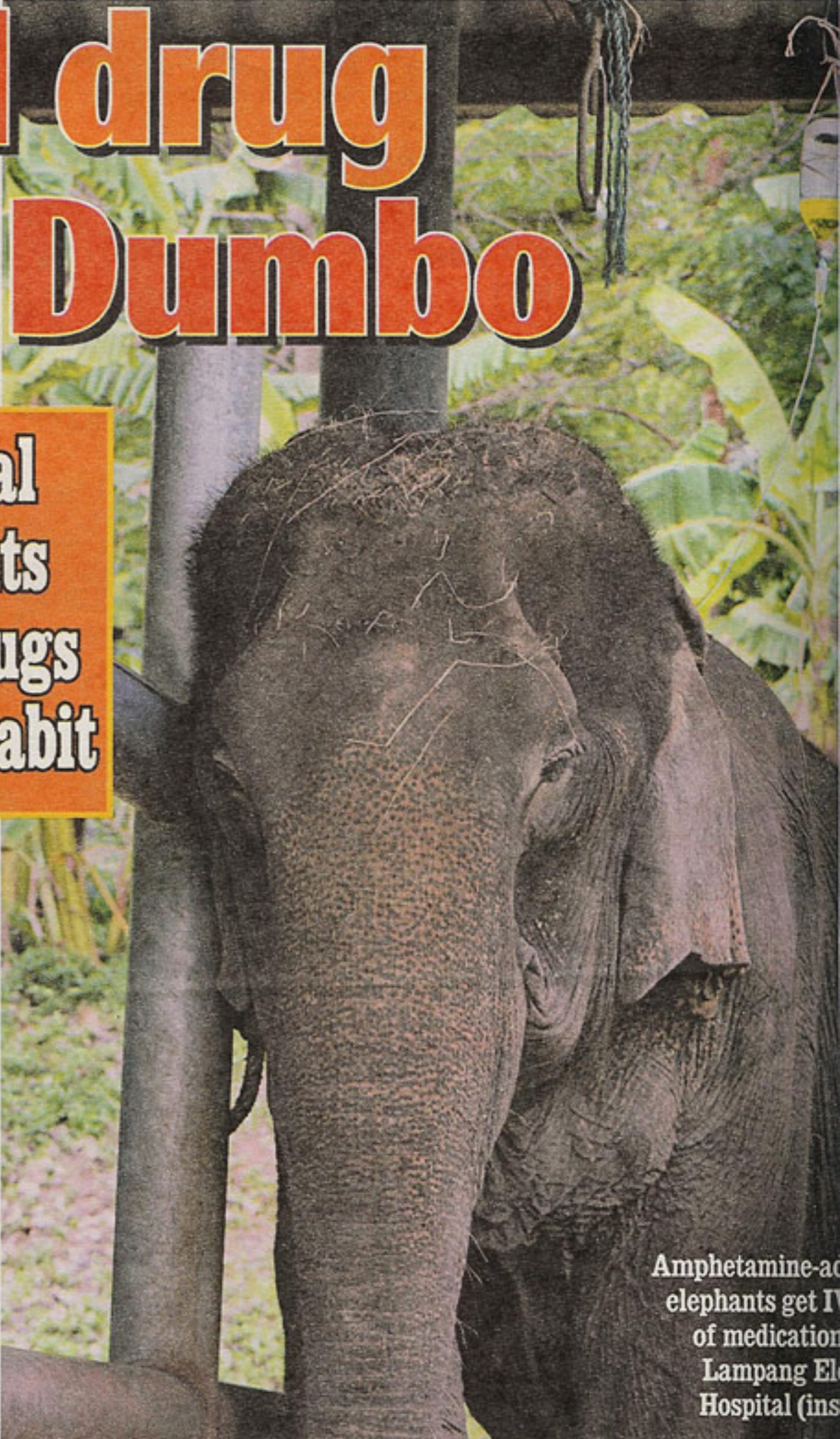


# Jumbo-sized drug problem for Dumbo



**Rehab hospital helps elephants hooked on drugs kick 'speed' habit**



Amphetamine-addicted elephants get IV of medication at Lampang Elephant Hospital (inset)

By Mary Malia

**D**OZENS of drug-addicted elephants owe their lives to dedicated veterinarians at a remote jungle rehab clinic.

Doctors at the Lampang Elephant Hospital, in the rain forests of northern Thailand, detox Asian elephants that have been turned into mammoth "speed freaks" by their cruel owners.

"We've treated dozens of amphetamine-addicted elephants," says veterinarian Dr. Sittidech Mahawangsakul.

In the backward Far Eastern nation, lumber harvesters still use trained elephants to move and stack giant logs.

To make the elephants work faster and longer, many handlers feed them the illegal "uppers."

The poor beasts quickly

become addicted as they labor in drug-fueled frenzies — until they collapse.

Most of the elephants that "crash" are left to die from exhaustion or other medical maladies linked to drug addiction.

A lucky few are trucked to the Lampang Elephant Hospital, one of only two such clinics in the country. There, the elephants must go "cold turkey."

"We don't wean them off the addictive drugs by reducing their doses," says veterinarian Dr. Preecha Puangkam.

"Instead, we stop these drugs altogether.

"Sometimes we have to give them tranquilizers to calm them down. Otherwise, it's a matter of multivitamins to build them up, antibiotics to kill infections, and a good diet.

"Some have infections, illnesses or injuries. We also see

some who have symptoms of stress — disobedience, for instance. We keep them in the jungle behind the hospital. We can see them getting better right before our eyes.

"We give medications either by IV drip or by mouth

— sometimes stuffing a handful of vitamin pills down their throats or hiding bad pills in the beast's food. We have to calculate doses carefully because a 5,000-pound Asian elephant weighs 100 pounds."

When possible, the veterinarians find kind-hearted handlers to adopt the rehab pachyderms.

Otherwise, the elephants spend their lives at a collection center near the hospital.

"The good news," says Mahawangsakul, "is that we're seeing fewer cases of heroin addiction giving drugs to elephants. It's due to our emphasis on educating people in the forestry busi-



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