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Steps to Curb Abuse of Synthetic Drugs

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Why in News

To deal with the problem of **abuse of synthetic drugs and New Psychotropic Substances (NPS)**, the government is considering generic scheduling of drugs to replace the practice of substance-by-substance scheduling.

Apart from this, the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) discussed the issue of large scale heroin trafficking from neighbouring countries, the diversion and abuse of pharmaceutical preparations, and poppy (Opium) cultivation in the country.

New Psychoactive Substances

- NPS are defined as “substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled by the United Nations drug conventions but which may pose a public health threat”.
- NPS are also known as “legal highs”, “bath salts” and “research chemicals”. For clarity, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** uses the term “New Psychoactive Substances”.

The term “new” does not necessarily refer to new inventions. Several NPS were first synthesized 40 years ago but the term “new” is used since they have recently become available in the market.

- NPS have similar effects as substances under international control such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin, Lysergic Acid Diethylamide (LSD), ecstasy (methamphetamine or MDMA).

- Since NPS are not controlled under the International Drug Control Conventions, their legal status can differ widely from country to country. **Eg.:**
Several countries where a large number of different NPS has rapidly emerged have adopted controls on entire substance groups of NPS using **generic approach**, or have **introduced analogue (similar) legislation** that invokes the principal of **chemical similarity** (i.e. drugs having similar narcotic/hallucinogenic effect with slight variations in chemical/structural composition) to an already controlled substance, so as to control substances that are not explicitly mentioned in the legislation.

Generic Scheduling of Drugs

Generic scheduling of drugs **provides flexibility to the government** to regulate **other substances (analogue) or a defined group of substances (generic)** which are not explicitly mentioned in the legislation, but which share some similarities with the controlled substances in terms of structure, effects, or both without appealing to a legislative reform.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

- The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was established in 1997.
- It acts as the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention by combining the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division of the United Nations Office at **Vienna**.
- It was named the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2002.
- UNODC publishes **World Drug Report**.

India and the Issue of Drug Trafficking

- **National Security:** India is vulnerable to narcotic drug trafficking as it is located between two largest Opium producing regions of the world, i.e., Golden Crescent in the west and Golden Triangle in the east.
 - **Golden Crescent region of South Asia**—comprising of **Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan**—is a principal global site for opium production and distribution.
 - **Golden Triangle** represents the region coinciding with the rural mountains of **Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand**. It is Southeast Asia's main opium-producing region and one of the oldest narcotics supply routes to Europe and North America.

- **Social Issue:** Drug abuse and misuse is a major threat to the society. It largely affects the youths who once involved in it, find it difficult to overcome. Drug abuse not only impact drug abusers' lives but equally affect their families and the community at large.

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is responsible for spreading awareness regarding drug demand reduction and rehabilitation of drug addicts.

- **Constitutional Ethos: Article 47 of the Indian Constitution** directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drugs injurious to health.
- **Legislative Provisions:** The broad legislative policy is contained in the three Central Acts, viz., Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and The Prevention of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1988.

The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs constituted through the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

- **Global Conventions:** India is a signatory to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, the Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.

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