



## Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023: UNODC

**For Prelims:** Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023: UNODC, [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#), Golden Triangle, Southeast Asia, [Opium cultivation](#), [Narcotics Control Bureau \(NCB\)](#).

**For Mains:** Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023: UNODC, Drug Menace: Threats, Challenges, Initiatives taken, challenges.

[Source: IE](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#) has released a report titled-***Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2023 - Cultivation, Production, and Implications***, highlighting that there is a significant increase in Opium Cultivation in the Golden Triangle, Southeast Asia.

### Note

- The **Golden Triangle** typically refers to a **region in Southeast Asia** known for the production of illicit drugs, particularly Opium. It's an area where the **borders of three countries meet:** Myanmar (formerly Burma), Laos, and Thailand.
- Originally, the term "Golden Triangle" referred to the opium-producing region covering parts of these three countries. However, it has evolved to denote a broader area associated with drug production, **trafficking, and organized crime.**
- One more infamous region for illicit drugs is Golden Crescent or "Death crescent", this crescent region **includes Afghanistan and Iran** - making it a natural transit point for drugs being smuggled out of Pakistan.

### What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

- **Opium Cultivation Increase in Myanmar:**
  - Opium cultivation in the Golden Triangle continued to expand over the past year 2022, with a significant increase in Myanmar.
  - There's been a **18% increase in [Opium cultivation](#)** in Myanmar, reaching 47,100 hectares.
  - This surge has made **Myanmar the world's largest source of opium**, particularly due to disruptions **following the [Military Takeover](#) in 2021.**
- **Increased Yield and Investment:**
  - The average estimated opium yield per hectare expanded by 16% to 22.9 kilograms/hectare.
  - This reflects advancements in farming practices and increased investments in irrigation systems and fertilizers, signaling a more sophisticated approach by farmers and buyers.

- **Rising Opium Prices:**
  - Despite an expanding supply, the **price paid to farmers increased by 27%** to approximately USD 355 per kilogram.
  - This price surge underscores the attractiveness of opium as a crop and commodity, indicating strong demand that fuels **the opium trade in the Golden Triangle.**
- **Impact of the Afghanistan Opium Ban:**
  - The report anticipates that a protracted ban on opium in Afghanistan will likely lead to sustained high prices and further increases in cultivation in Southeast Asia.
  - The Taliban's ban has led to **a 95% drop in the cultivation of opium poppies** in Afghanistan
- **Contribution to Illicit Economy:**
  - The expansion of opium cultivation contributes to a **broader illicit economy in the Mekong region** (Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam).
  - It fuels synthetic drug production and a convergence of drug trafficking, money laundering, and online criminal activities, generating significant profits for organized crime groups.
- **Recommendations:**
  - The crisis in Myanmar exacerbates crime and governance challenges in the region. Addressing these issues necessitates **comprehensive solutions considering the complex realities faced** by people in opium-cultivation areas. Providing viable alternatives to opium cultivation and improving socio-economic conditions are crucial to mitigate this trend.
  - Given the insecurities and economic hardships faced by farming communities, the UNODC's direct engagement with these communities in Myanmar and Laos becomes more critical than ever.
  - Building resilience and offering sustainable income generation alternatives are **vital to combat the allure of opium cultivation.**

## What are the Key Facts about Opium Poppy Plants?

- **Scientific Name:** *Papaver somniferum*
- **Uses:** Opium derived from the **sap of the opium poppy** has been used for centuries as a pain reliever, sedative, and in the production of various opioids, including morphine, codeine, and heroin. Medicinally, it has been employed to alleviate severe pain, suppress coughs, and induce sleep.
- **Global Production:** India is the **sole country authorized by the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)** to produce gum opium. Additionally, other countries like Australia, Austria, France, China, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, and the Czech Republic cultivate opium poppies. However, these countries do not extract gum but instead use the Concentrate of Poppy Straw process (CPS).
  - This process involves cutting the bulb with 8 inches of the stalk for processing in its entirety.

## What is the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime?

- It was established in 1997 and was named as a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2002.
- 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.

## What are the Related Initiatives to Tackle Drug Abuse ?

- **Indian:**
  - [Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan/Drugs-Free India Campaign](#)
  - [National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction](#)
  - [Narco-Coordination Centre](#)

- [National Fund to Control Drug Abuse](#)

- **Global Initiatives:**

- Single [Convention on Narcotic Drugs](#), 1961.
- The [Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971](#).
- The UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in [Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988](#).
  - India is a signatory to all three and has enacted the [Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances \(NDPS\) Act, 1985](#).
- Every year, the UN publishes a [World Drug Report, Global Drug Policy Index](#).

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### Prelims

#### Q. Consider the following statements:

1. The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) has a 'Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air'.
2. The UNCAC is the ever-first legally binding global anti-corruption instrument.
3. A highlight of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) is the inclusion of a specific chapter aimed at returning assets to their rightful owners from whom they had been taken illicitly.
4. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is mandated by its member States to assist in the implementation of both UNCAC and UNTOC.

#### Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Ans: (c)

### Mains

Q. In one of the districts of a frontier state, narcotics menace has been rampant. This has resulted in money laundering, mushrooming of poppy farming, arms smuggling and near stalling of education. The system is on the verge of collapse. The situation has been further worsened by unconfirmed reports that local politicians as well as senior police officers are providing surreptitious patronage to the drug mafia. At that point of time a woman police officer, known for her skills in handling such situations is appointed as Superintendent of Police to bring the situation to normalcy.

If you are the same police officer, identify the various dimensions of the crisis. Based on your understanding, suggest measures to deal with the crisis. (2019)