



Role of the Internet in Drug Trafficking

For Prelims: Role of the Internet in Drug Trafficking, [International Narcotics Control Board](#), [Drug Trafficking](#).

For Mains: Role of the Internet in Drug Trafficking, Initiatives taken to tackle Drug Menace.

Source: [INCB](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the [International Narcotics Control Board](#) in its 2023 Annual Report, highlighted that online [Drug Trafficking](#) has **increased the availability of drugs on the illicit market**.

Drug Trafficking:

- Drug trafficking refers to the **illegal trade involving the cultivation**, manufacture, distribution, and sale of illicit drugs.
- It encompasses a **wide range of activities associated with the illegal drug trade**, including the production of drugs such as **cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and synthetic drugs**, as well as the transportation and distribution of these substances.
- Drug trafficking **operates within a complex network of criminal organisations** that span across borders, regions, and even continents.

What are the Key Highlights of the Annual Report by the International Narcotics Control Board?

- **Regional Drug Supply Trends:**
 - In Afghanistan, illicit [opium poppy cultivation](#) and heroin production declined dramatically.
 - The opioid crisis continues to have **serious consequences in North America** with the number of deaths that involve synthetic opioids other than methadone continuing to increase, **reaching more than 70,000 in 2021**.
 - Drug trafficking organisations continue to expand their operations in the Amazon **Basin into illegal mining**, illegal logging and wildlife trafficking.
 - Record levels of illicit coca bush cultivation were recorded in Colombia and Peru, rising by 13% and 18% respectively.
 - Seizures of cocaine reached a record level in 2021 in West and Central Africa, a significant transit region for cocaine.
 - **South Asia** appears to be increasingly being targeted for the trafficking of **methamphetamine illicitly** manufactured in Afghanistan to Europe and Oceania.
 - Pacific island States have transformed from solely transit sites along drug trafficking routes

to destination markets for synthetic drugs.

- This is posing significant challenges to communities and their public health systems.

▪ **Challenges in Online Drug Trafficking:**

- There is an evolving landscape of **online drug trafficking**, presenting new challenges to drug control.
- The increased availability of **illicit drugs on the Internet**, exploitation by criminal groups of online platforms, and the risk of overdose deaths due to the online presence of **synthetic opioids like fentanyl** are significant challenges.

▪ **Exploitation of Online Platforms:**

- Criminals are **exploiting legitimate [e-commerce platforms](#)**, social media, and other online platforms for drug trafficking.
- Encryption methods, anonymous browsing on the darknet, and cryptocurrencies are **used to avoid detection**, making it **difficult to prosecute** online trafficking offences.
 - France's law enforcement authorities collected more than 120 million text messages **from 60,000 mobile phones**.

▪ **Concerns about Patient Safety:**

- Patient safety is at risk from illicit Internet pharmacies that sell drugs without a prescription directly to consumers.
- It is impossible for consumers to know whether the drugs are counterfeit, unapproved or even illegal.
- The global trade in illicit pharmaceuticals is estimated **to be worth 4.4 billion USD**.

▪ **Recommendations:**

- Despite challenges, there are opportunities to **use online platforms for drug use prevention, awareness campaigns**, and improving access to drug treatment services.
 - Governments **can use social media platforms to conduct drug use prevention** campaigns to prevent substance misuse among young people in particular.
- **Telemedicine and Internet pharmacies** could improve access to healthcare and help reach patients with drug use disorders and deliver drug treatment services to more people.
- Online platforms could also be **used for sharing information about the adverse consequences of drug use** and communicating warnings of adulterated drugs which could save lives.
- Placing certain **amphetamine-type stimulant precursors and fentanyl precursors under international control** to prevent illicit drug manufacturers from substituting controlled chemicals with closely related substitutes.
- Given the global nature of online platforms, **collaborative efforts between governments, international organizations**, regulatory authorities, and the private sector are essential to identify new threats and develop effective responses.
 - INCB encourages voluntary cooperation to tackle the misuse of legitimate e-commerce platforms for drug trafficking.

International Narcotics Control Board

- The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is the **independent and quasi-judicial monitoring body** for the implementation of the [United Nations](#) international drug control conventions.
- It was established in 1968 in accordance with the **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961**.
- Its secretariat is **located in Vienna, Austria**.
 - India's [Narcotics Control Bureau \(NCB\)](#), cooperates with the INCB.

Narcotics Control Bureau

- It was constituted by the Government of India in **1986 under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985**.
- It is the **apex coordinating agency** under the **Ministry of Home Affairs**.
- The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is based on **Article 47 of the Indian Constitution** which directs the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drugs injurious to health.

What are the Initiatives Taken by India to Curb the Drug Menace?

- **The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985:** It prohibits a person from **producing, possessing, selling, purchasing, transporting**, storing, and/or consuming any narcotic drug or psychotropic substance.
 - **The National Fund for Control of Drug Abuse** was also created under a provision of the NDPS Act, 1985, to meet the expenditure incurred in the implementation of the Act.
- **National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction:** The **Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment** has prepared a plan for Drug Demand Reduction for 2018-25.
 - This plan **focuses on preventive education, awareness generation, identification, counselling**, treatment, and rehabilitation of drug-dependent persons, as well as **training and capacity building of service providers** through collaborative efforts of government and **Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)**.
- **Nasha Mukh Bharat Campaign (NMBA):** NMBA was launched in 2020 to tackle the issue of Substance Abuse and a vision to make India drug-free. **It is a three-pronged attack combining:**
 - The supply curb by the **Narcotics Control Bureau**
 - Outreach and Awareness and Demand Reduction efforts by Social Justice and Empowerment
 - Treatment through the Health Department.
- **International Treaties and Conventions to Combat Drug Menace:** India is a signatory of the following international treaties and conventions:
 - **United Nations (UN) Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**
 - **UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)**
 - **UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)**
 - **UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) 2000**

Conclusion

- Addressing the issue of drug trafficking requires comprehensive strategies that encompass law enforcement efforts, international cooperation, border control measures, and robust demand reduction initiatives.
- By tackling both the supply and demand sides of the illicit drug trade, governments and communities can work together to mitigate its harmful effects and safeguard public health and safety.

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)**

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