



Combating Synthetic Drug Trafficking in India

For Prelims: [Synthetic drug](#), [New psychoactive substances](#), [Dark net](#), [Golden Crescent](#), [Narcotics Control Bureau](#), [Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyan](#)

For Mains: Drug Trafficking and National Security, Legal and Policy Framework on Drug Control, Public Health and Drug Addiction

[Source:BL](#)

Why in News?

India is facing a surge in [synthetic drug trafficking](#). In response, Haryana's Narcotics Control Bureau has set up an **Anti-Synthetic Narcotics Task Force** to track networks, monitor precursor chemicals, and dismantle hidden labs in the state.

What are Synthetic Drugs?

- **About:** Synthetic drugs are fully created in labs using **precursor chemicals** (a compound that participates in a chemical reaction that produces another compound) and do not require any **plant-based components**.
- **Classification of Drugs:**

Category	Source	Examples
Natural Drugs	Directly from plants	Opium poppy (Papaver somniferous), Cannabis, Coca
Semi-Synthetic Drugs	Chemically modified from natural drugs	Morphine, Codeine, Heroin, Cocaine
Synthetic Drugs	Fully lab-manufactured	Amphetamines, ecstasy, diazepam, methaqualone

What are the Concerns Regarding Synthetic Drugs?

- **Loopholes from Rapid Innovation:** Synthetic drugs are often slightly modified to create [new psychoactive substances \(NPS\)](#) that fall outside the [Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act \(NDPS\), 1985](#) purview.
 - For instance, **fentanyl analogues** have surfaced faster than Indian agencies can classify them as narcotics, hindering enforcement efforts.
- **Ease of Production:** Unlike plant-based narcotics, synthetic drugs can be produced in **small, concealed labs** using easily available precursor chemicals.
 - This **decentralised model** makes detection and dismantling more difficult.
- **Difficulty in Detection:** Traditional drugs like heroin, cannabis, and poppy husk require **extensive supply chains**, often involving **cross-border smuggling**. However, synthetic drugs are often disguised within **legitimate industrial or pharmaceutical consignments**.

- Traditional methods like **border checks and sniffer dogs** are less effective.
- Trafficking networks increasingly rely on the [dark net](#), [cryptocurrencies](#), and [blockchain technology](#) for encrypted financial transaction channels. This makes tracking financial transactions and supply chains significantly more complex.
- **High Potency and Fatality:** Synthetic drugs like fentanyl are **extremely potent**, with even small doses causing fatal overdoses.
 - The **low cost and high availability of synthetic drugs** increase the risk of mass addiction, especially among youth. Indian states are witnessing a rise in drug-induced psychosis, crime, and dropouts from education.
- **Global Synthetic Drug Influence on India:** India faces significant challenges due to the global shift in synthetic drug production to low-risk, high-access regions.
 - India, as one of the major producers of [active pharmaceutical ingredients \(APIs\)](#), along with China, and being located between the [Golden Crescent](#) and [Golden Triangle](#), struggles to prevent the diversion of legal chemicals into illicit drug manufacturing.
 - The rise of **online forums and tutorials** has further complicated law enforcement efforts and public health responses by making it easier for non-experts to synthesize dangerous drugs.

Legal Framework for Drug Enforcement in India

- India's drug law enforcement is rooted in **Article 47** of the Constitution, which mandates the state to prohibit the consumption of intoxicating substances, except for medicinal purposes.
- India's drug control policy is guided by three key legislations: **the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940**, the **Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985**, and the **Prevention of Illicit Traffic in NDPS Act, 1988**.
- The responsibility for **drug abuse control is a central function**. The Ministry of Finance, through the [Department of Revenue](#), oversees the implementation of the NDPS Act, 1985, and the Prevention of Illicit Traffic in NDPS Act, 1988.
 - To strengthen enforcement, the [Narcotics Control Bureau \(NCB\)](#) was established in 1986, as the **central authority** responsible for coordinating actions against drug trafficking and enforcing drug control measures.

What Reforms are Needed to Curtail Synthetic Drugs in India?

- **Legislative Modernization:** Amend the NDPS Act to include **generic scheduling** of drugs to **pre-emptively control emerging chemical variants**, reducing the legislative lag exploited by traffickers.
 - Establish a fast-track mechanism under the **Ministry of Home Affairs to classify emerging NPS**.
- **National Precursor Control Network:** Haryana's Anti-Synthetic Narcotics Task Force uses a real-time chemical tracking system in collaboration with the **State Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** to detect and prevent illegal diversion.
 - Expanding this, a **National precursor monitoring system** should integrate state FDAs and manufacturers, ensuring every transaction is **logged, analyzed, and flagged** for irregularities, with AI-driven alerts for suspicious bulk transactions.
- **Digital Surveillance:** Integrate global blockchain forensic tools like **Chainalysis** to trace **cryptocurrency-fueled drug payments**, enhancing digital financial surveillance and strengthening efforts to combat synthetic drug trafficking.
- **International Coordination:** India should leverage its participation in [UN conventions](#) like the **Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)**, **Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)**, and the **UN Convention against Illicit Traffic (1988)** to combat global synthetic drug cartels.
 - Collaborate with [INTERPOL](#) for intelligence sharing and best practices to **strengthen transnational efforts**, and enhance drug control measures.

- **Health and Awareness Measures:** Expand de-addiction infrastructure under the [National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction \(NAPDDR\)](#), and launch targeted campaigns under [Nasha Mukht Bharat Abhiyan \(NMBA\)](#) on the **risks of synthetic drugs**, especially among youth and urban populations.

Drishti Mains Question:

How do synthetic drugs differ from traditional narcotics, and why are they harder to regulate?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

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.

Q. 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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