

Use of women for trafficking drugs via India on rise (June 26 is International Day Against Drug Abuse)

By Mayank Aggarwal New Delhi | June 23, 2008 10:35:06 AM IST

Powerful cartels from West Africa are increasingly using human carriers, especially women from Southeast Asia, to smuggle drugs via India, warns the country's Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).

"The use of human carriers, especially women, for drug trafficking is on the rise. Nigerian gangs are sending cocaine and heroin through Southeast Asian women," A.P. Siddiqui, NCB's deputy director, told IANS ahead of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking June 26.

Women from Thailand and Malaysia are increasingly being used as drug carriers. "This growing trend is worrying and we are on the alert," Siddiqui said.

A number of such drug carriers arrested by various security agencies are lodged in Tihar Jail at present. Experts say the women are used only once or twice after which gangs shift to new recruits.

Traffickers also resort to traditional drug trafficking methods like couriers. In July 2007, NCB seized two parcels together containing more than one kilogram of heroin at a New Delhi courier office. The two parcels were headed for Canada and South Africa.

Siddiqui said NCB regularly carries out sensitisation programmes with courier agencies, asking them to be on the alert about packets containing drugs.

However, the work of anti-narcotics agencies is getting tougher with an increase in trafficking and the production of opium in Afghanistan.

"In Afghanistan, opium production has increased from 3,000 tonnes in 2003 to 8,000 tonnes in 2008. This has led to a boost in the drugs being smuggled to India from 200-300 kg to 400 kg in the last three years," Siddiqui said.

In India, ganja, hashish, and heroin are commonly abused drugs. Cocaine and synthetic drugs such as Ecstasy, Adam and Love Drug are still limited to urban elites, authorities said.

"In 2007, 1,100 kg of heroin, 5,000 kg of hashish and 2,000 kg of opium were seized by different agencies, marking a considerable increase in hashish seizures," Siddiqui said.

The drugs coming from Afghanistan now head for China, Australia and Southeast Asia, which have emerged as new markets compared to the US and Europe.

Siddiqui has a word of caution for the security agencies as well. He said after seizing drugs, their value should not be glorified; otherwise it lures peddlers. He also said that all abusers need not be peddlers and the agencies should keep that in mind.

Rajiv Walia, project coordinator with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), agreed. He said police should keep in mind the difference between a drug abuser and a trafficker.

"We run a number of de-addiction and rehabilitation programmes and we have seen how a little help can change the life of a drug addict. They don't need punishment as they will never be able to quit then," said Walia.[ma/kbd/pg](#)