

ON A GLOBAL TRIP



Atul Thakur | 110

On World Anti-Drugs Day, Atul Thakur brings you this report on the centres of production and consumption as well as the transit routes for some of the biggest problem drugs

New Delhi: According to the UNO's World Drug Report 2006, almost 16 million people abuse opiates globally. Opiates are the main problem drug in most parts of the world, accounting for almost two thirds of all drug treatment demand in Asia and close to 60% of treatment demand in Europe.

Afghanistan alone produces 89% of the world's illicit opium - from which morphine and heroin are ultimately produced and hence called opiates. Myanmar produces about 7% and the rest of world put together accounts for the remaining 4% of opium production.

Afghanistan is the major source of opiates for West Asia and Europe. Myanmar and the Lao PDR are the main suppliers for China, Australia and South-East Asia. In the Americas, Mexico, Colombia and Peru are the main source for the US and Canada.

The two main markets for Afghan opiates are the UK and Italy. From Afghanistan, the opiates are trafficked to Iran, from where they reach Turkey, which is the main entry point for the European market. From Turkey, the drug is typically trafficked to Bulgaria then Austria, from where it reaches Germany, then the Netherlands and finally the UK. There could be some shifts in the intermediate transit routes, but these points are usually constant.

Heroin is trafficked to Italy via the Balkan route, more than 50% transiting through Albania and around 20% through Turkey. A relatively minor entry point for the European market is the Russian Federation. On this route, shipments from Iran reach Ukraine and the Russian Federation via the Caucasus region, from where they travel through Romania to get to Western Europe.

In the Americas, the main trafficking routes are from Mexico and Colombia to the US. In south-east Asia and Oceania, Thailand is the main transit point. Situated strategically between the Lao PDR and Myanmar, Thailand is the main supplier for markets in Australia, New Zealand, China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The number of opium seizures and the intensity of abuse are used by authorities as indicators of trafficking routes. Notably, an estimated 50% of the drug is consumed along the routes alone. Typically it takes about a year for the opi-

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ates to reach their European destinations after they have left Afghanistan.

India alone is estimated to have about 3 million opiate abusers, though it is not really part of any well-established route. Perhaps the sheer proximity to Afghanistan explains the extent to which opiates have taken root in India, apart from the fact that the country itself has a sizeable production of legitimate opium for medical use.

The source of the other major problem drug - cocaine - is much more geographically concentrated than is the case with opium. Almost 99% of the coca leaf, from which cocaine is extracted, is cultivated in three Andean countries of

South America. Colombia produces around 70% of the world's cocaine, Peru about 20% and Bolivia almost all of the remaining 10%.

This explains why American drug abusers are more likely to be hooked to cocaine than to opiates. The major markets for cocaine are North America, Europe, Central America and the Caribbean. Patterns indicate that around 60% of cocaine is transported through the Pacific coast of South America and 40% from the Atlantic coast. The most important transit point for the US is Mexico. However, 10% of the cocaine entering the US also comes through the Caribbean Islands.

Spain is Europe's main entry point for cocaine. Ecuador and Venezuela are the main transit points for the European route. Most of the cocaine in Spain enters through Galicia, the north-western region of the country. However, over the last couple of years, Andalusia in southern Spain is also gaining importance as an entry point.

Apart from Spain, the Netherlands and Portugal are other key entry points for the European cocaine market. West and Central Africa are also emerging as significant transit points for the European market. From here, the cocaine is trafficked to Spain and Portugal. Africa is also the transit point for smaller markets in China, Japan, Australia, and other Asian and Oceania countries.

That includes India, fortunately still a minor market for cocaine. Most of the cocaine that finds its way to India is believed to be routed through Nigeria and other west African nations.

► Related report, P 5

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