

## Opening Remarks

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Drug trafficking and abuse are the scourge of humanity. Global drug trafficking is estimated to be worth about US \$300 billion, which is more than the GDP of many nations.

The root of drug problem lies in their illicit production. Almost all major drugs of abuse are produced using some chemicals. These chemicals are called as precursors in the field of drug law enforcement. If the manufacture and trade in these chemicals are regulated effectively to prevent their diversion for illicit use, illicit production of drugs can be prevented.

South Asia is located between two of the world's largest drug producing regions. Precursors produced in India are often diverted to these regions by unscrupulous traders. Precursors produced in India have also been found to be misused by illicit drug manufacturing facilities identified within India by various law enforcement agencies. One of the biggest challenges for the drug law enforcement agencies in India is preventing diversion of these precursors for illicit use.

Let us examine the magnitude of the problem. In a single consignment, 9 tonnes of acetic anhydride was smuggled in a container from India. The consignment, destined for Afghanistan, was dispatched by some Indian and one Pakistani operator but was seized *enroute* by Dubai authorities. The case was followed by the officers of the Central Bureau of Narcotics and they found that the container was exported using forged papers. I am glad to know that all those involved were caught and recently convicted to 10 years rigorous imprisonment. If the consignment was not caught, this would have been sufficient to produce up to 30 million doses of heroin. You can imagine the number of lives saved with this single seizure.

A few months ago, the DRI seized 2 tonnes of ephedrine-another precursor chemical. This precursor is produced in India for manufacturing cough syrups and other anti-asthmatic drugs. It is often diverted and smuggled to Myanmar for manufacturing synthetic drugs called amphetamine type stimulants or ATS for short. ATS are the fastest growing drugs of abuse worldwide. Abuse of ATS is also growing rapidly in northeastern states of India. This single seizure of 2 tonnes of ephedrine prevented the production of about 5 million doses of ATS.

Last year, enforcement authorities in India seized over 11 tonnes of

methaqualone (commonly called mandrax) which is more than the global seizures of this drug in many years. Four illicit factories producing this drug were also dismantled by Indian authorities. All these factories use precursors manufactured and diverted from licit trade in India.

India has a well-developed chemical and pharmaceutical industry that produces and uses many precursors. To regulate manufacture, trade and use of these precursors, precursor control laws have been framed.

International tracking operations like 'Operation Purple' and 'Operation Topaz' aim to prevent diversion of precursors from international trade. India has also been an active partner in all these operations.

Precursor control is a new concept to many enforcement officers and it is essential that awareness be increased. The UNODC Regional Precursor Control Project has been striving to achieve this objective through training programmes, workshops, etc. This is the first workshop in India that aims to bring judges, enforcement officers and prosecutors on to a common platform to discuss precursor control laws. I understand the workshop also aims to discuss common deficiencies and difficulties in investigations.

The future of drug problem is the abuse of synthetic drugs. According to the World Drug Report 2000, more people are addicted to amphetamine type stimulants than to cocaine, heroin and other opiates put together. Addiction to ATS is also growing rapidly in north east India and going by the experience of other countries, it may soon become a major drug of addiction in India. Manufacturing ATS is relatively easy if you have access to the precursors. For instance, there is only a difference of one oxygen atom between methamphetamine (the drug) and ephedrine (its precursor). Recipes for manufacture ATS are all available on the web. Any student can manufacture ATS in his flat with a few equipment if he has access to the precursors and these precursors are widely traded in India legally. Precursor control, therefore, holds the key to dealing with future drug problems in India.

I wish this workshop success.