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The World Drug Report 2020: UN

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Why in News

Recently, the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, in its 2020 **World Drug Report**, has highlighted the possible consequences of the **Covid-19 pandemic** on **Illegal Drug Production, Supply and Consumption**.

- According to it, due to **economic hardship**, people may resort to **illicit activities** linked to drugs to make a living.
- The report further, revealed that the **measures** taken by governments to counter the pandemic inevitably had **double-edged consequences** on large-scale drug supply.

Key Points

- **Economic Crisis and Diverted Focus:**
 - There would be reductions in **drug-related budgets** of the governments due to **Covid-19** and overall increase in drug use, with a shift towards **cheaper and more harmful drugs**.
 - Some countries, such as Italy, the Niger and countries in Central Asia, have experienced a **sharp decrease in drug seizures**, as drug traffickers have **diverted their attention to other illegal activities**, including **cybercrime and trafficking in falsified medicines** (in Balkan countries).
 - Other countries, including Morocco and Iran, have reported huge drug seizures, indicating large-scale drug trafficking.

- **Impact of Lockdown:**

- The **lockdown** could hinder the production and sale of opiates in major producing countries as the key months for the opium harvest in Afghanistan are March to June.
- The decline in international trade resulting from the pandemic could lead to a shortage in the supply of **acetic anhydride**, a precursor vital to the manufacture of heroin

A **shortage of poppy lancers** was observed in the western and southern provinces of the country, mainly due to the closure of a border crossing with Pakistan. However, the shortage of lancers was eventually overcome due to women workers increasingly engaged in the poppy-lancing process, therefore

- The report also indicated that the **lockdown is increasing demand for cannabis**, given that its production often takes place near consumer markets and traffickers.
- **Drug trafficking** by air is likely to be completely disrupted by the restrictions on air travel. There are signs of increased use of maritime routes.

- **Maritime Routes:**

- The recent heroin seizures in the **Indian Ocean** could be interpreted as an indication of an increase in the use of maritime routes for trafficking heroin to Europe along the 'southern route'.
- While border measures appear to be hindering trafficking in opiates, large shipments of cocaine are still being trafficked but by alternative means, via sea routes.

India and Illicit Drug Trade

- **Major Hub of Illicit Drug Trade:** According to a report by the **United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, India is one of the major hubs of illicit drug trade ranging from age-old cannabis to newer prescription drugs like tramadol, and designer drugs like methamphetamine.
- **Drug Trafficking Routes:** India is in the **middle of two major illicit opium production** regions in the world, the **Golden Crescent (Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan)** in the west and the **Golden Triangle (South-East Asia)** in the east.

Golden Triangle

- It represents the region coinciding with the rural mountains of **Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand**.
- It is Southeast Asia's main opium-producing region and one of the oldest narcotics supply routes to Europe and North America.

Golden Crescent

- This region of South Asia is a principal global site for opium production and distribution.
- It comprises **Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.**

Associated Challenges:

- **Easy Borders:** The borders are porous and difficult to control in the lower Mekong region so cross-border movements in many places are not significantly hindered by Covid-19 measures.
- **Evolving Ways of Trafficking:** The methods of containerised trafficking, couriers and body-packing have reduced due to shutting down of borders and trade. However, dealers might come up with other ways limiting the impact of reduced trade.
- **Limited Control:** There is limited government control in the Golden Triangle, trafficking would continue at high volumes.
- **Unaffected Supply:** The supply of precursor chemicals is not likely to be disrupted because major organised crime groups source chemicals through direct diversion from industry and not diversion from illicit overseas trade channels.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

- It was established in **1997 and was named as a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2002.**
- It acts as the **Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention** by combining the United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP) and the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division of the United Nations Office at Vienna.
- UNODC publishes the **World Drug Report.**

Way Forward

- Additional efforts would be required at the national, regional, and international level to carefully **analyse methods and trends to understand changes to drug markets** in the wake of the pandemic.
- There is a need to **understand the change in the strategy** of drug trafficking organisations as a result of the Covid-19 measures.
- Therefore, **use of maritime trafficking routes** from Myanmar along the Andaman Sea, some of which cross Indian territorial waters must be strategically observed by India to curb the trafficking.
- Moreover, methods or procedures to deal with illicit drug supply, their usage must be **institutionalised in order to ensure that fight against this menace** is not compromised in face of a pandemic or any other crisis.

Source: TH