



Thailand Makes Marijuana Legal

For Prelims: Marijuana, Narcotic Drugs and Psychoactive Substances

For Mains: Legalization and Criminalization of Marijuana

Why in News?

Recently, Thailand has legalized cultivating and possessing Marijuana but recreational use (Such as smoking) is still banned, even though advocates say the **easing effectively decriminalises Marijuana**.

- The nation is the first to advance such a move in **South-East Asia**, a region known for its stringent drug laws.
- Thailand, with **its year-round tropical climate, has long had a history with Cannabis which many locals commonly used in traditional medicines.**

What are the Key Highlights?

- The goal is to get a head start on its neighbours in winning a large slice of the **lucrative market for health treatments using cannabis derivatives**, in particular the milder compound CBD (Cannabidiol). But there is another motive, **to reducing overcrowding in some of the world's most overcrowded jails.**
- Which means, in theory, with cultivation of the plant in any quantities now completely legalised, that the police are now unlikely to arrest people just for possession of marijuana.
- The government is hoping that **developing a local cannabis trade will boost agriculture and tourism.**
- It is an opportunity for people and the state **to earn income from marijuana and hemp.**

What is Marijuana?

- **About:**
 - Marijuana is **a psychoactive drug from the Cannabis plant** used for medical, recreational & religious purposes.
 - Cannabis can be used for **smoking, vaporization, within food, or as an extract.**
 - It creates **mental and physical effects, such as a "high" or "stoned" feeling**, a general change in perception, and an increase in appetite.
 - Short term side effects **may include a decrease in short-term memory**, dry mouth, impaired motor skills, red eyes, and feelings of paranoia or anxiety.
 - Long term side effects may **include addiction, decreased mental ability and behavioural problems** in children whose mothers' used cannabis during pregnancy.
- **Regulation in India:**
 - Cannabis was regulated by the state excise departments and legally sold till 1985.
 - In 1985 The **Narcotic Drugs and Psychoactive Substances (NDPS) Act** has been enacted central level commercial cultivation of cannabis by production, possession,

- sale/purchase, transportation, interstate import/export or any other forms is punishable. The Act has been amended three times – in 1988, 2001, and most recently in 2014.
- While CBD oil manufacturing is licenced under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 can be legally used and sold. Some Indian websites do sell. But to purchase it one needs a prescription and many even facilitate it.
 - Similarly, Bhang, ganja and charas are enlisted in the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 for use in Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani.

What are the Facets of Marijuana Legalisation and Criminalisation?

▪ Legalization:

◦ Curb crime:

- Evidence suggests that **strict enforcement of the [narcotics law based on prohibition tends to target the most defenceless members](#) along the [drug smuggling chain](#).**
- Prohibition **strengthens the cartels** they should be targeting. The big cartels and traffickers remain out of reach of the regular law enforcement machinery.
- **Filling jails with drug users and street-level suppliers only stresses** the criminal justice system.

◦ Cultural and Historical Significance:

- The documented use of cannabis in India dates back to the [Vedic period](#). In the Atharva-veda, the 'bhang' plant finds a notable mention as one of nature's five sacred, distress-relieving plants. During the festival of Holi, the consumption of bhang is an integral part of the celebrations even today.
- Indian Hemp Drugs Commission in 1894 found consumption of cannabis in colonial India extensive and determined that its use was very ancient, had some religious sanction, and was harmless in moderation.
- The commission recommended against complete ban on its consumption as it can push consumer towards other hard drugs.
- Until 1985, when NDPS Act was enacted, cannabis derivatives — bhang, charas and ganja — were regulated by the various state excise departments and legally sold by licensed shops.

◦ Less Health Risk when compared to Alcohol:

- [WHO \(World Health Organization\)](#) study concluded that the public health risks from cannabis use were likely less severe than those posed by alcohol and tobacco, which are legal.

◦ Business and Economic Possibilities:

- The legal marijuana market is currently worth more than USD 7 billion globally, and is expected to hit USD 31 billion by 2021.
- The fabric produced from hemp is of very high quality. Hemp is also highly suitable as a technical fibre. India also has many startups working in this field like The mumbai-based The Bombay Hemp Co. (BOHECO).

▪ Criminalization:

◦ Marijuana Causes Psychosis:

- Marijuana can trigger mental health related issues in its users. THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) in marijuana has been proved to cause psychosis.
- Those who use it as adolescents or younger may be more likely to develop mental health problems later in life. In some cases, it can also make people feel nauseous, lethargic, forgetful, anxious, or confused.

◦ Marijuana is a gateway drug:

- Cannabis has been engineered to become much more as an addictive. Growers has decreased level of CBD and increased level of THC.
- A vulnerable person who will abuse it as a gateway drug before moving to more dangerous substances. In a study it was found that 45% who used marijuana also used other 'Hard' drugs.

◦ Marijuana damages organs:

- WHO has listed a number of diseases associated with the consumption of marijuana, including impairment in cognitive functioning, airway injury, bronchitis and lung inflammation.

- **Regulations difficult to enforce:**

- If marijuana will be available at a pharmacy with a prescription (like in the US) how government will ensure that it's not bought for recreational purpose. Considering, cough syrups and inhalants are freely accessible and brought incessantly by addicts.

Way Forward

- Prohibiting and making it illegal has not prevented the availability of marijuana in the market nor its use by people.
- The potential risks that cannabis poses illustrate why it is necessary to legally regulate this drug. Rather than leaving the trade of cannabis in the hands of an unregulated criminal market, the drug should be safely produced by competent farmers, packaged and tested in suitable facilities, and sold by reputable and licensed vendors.
- Regulation allows cannabis buyers to know what they are consuming and moderate their intake in accordance with the THC level in the marketed marijuana.
- Imposing tax on cannabis sales can create revenue for the state. Tax collected could be spent on educating people about the risks of cannabis use, like public service information on alcohol and tobacco.

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