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# India and Central Asia: Menace of Drug and Narcotic Trafficking

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## Introduction

In the Globalised World, the world is not only integrated economically but also politically and culturally. In the same manner, security threats are also integrated and have become global security threats. There are traditional and non-traditional security threats. The concept of traditional security is narrow and confined only to military aspect. The non-traditional security has larger scope and includes the security of individuals. Nowadays the non-traditional security threats like religious extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking, smuggling of weapons, climate change, water scarcity are emerging and affecting the world as a whole. All these security threats are also faced by the Central Asian countries. Drug trafficking is a non-traditional security threat and it is transnational in nature. The threats of non-

traditional nature are not confined to a particular country or a particular region but it has global impact. All the countries of the world are impacted by these threats. The adverse effect of drug trafficking is not confined to a particular region but affects almost all the countries in the present world. India and countries of Central Asia are extremely affected by drug trafficking in their own regions and the drug menace of Afghanistan and Pakistan. This does not mean that opium is not cultivated in India and Central Asian countries. Cultivation of illegal opium exists in these countries as well. This invites cooperation between India and Central Asia to control drug and narcotic trafficking in India and Central Asia.

Drug and narcotic trafficking has emerged as a burning security threat for India and Central Asian countries. Opium cultivation in these countries combined with the

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problem posed from Pakistan and Afghanistan are responsible to threaten the social security of these countries. The instability which arises due to drug and narcotic trafficking threatens not only India and Central Asia but also the entire world due to globalised nature of international security. "Trade in illicit drugs has the largest societal, political, and economic consequences and threatens the fabric of societies through addiction, crime, and disease. It exacerbates corruption in weak states and impairs their economic and political functioning. Central Asian states have been a victim of growing international drug trafficking, which pose serious threats to the larger region, including China, India, and Russia."<sup>1</sup>

### **Joint Efforts**

The location of Central Asia invites global attention. However, the stability of India and Central Asian countries are interrelated. The geostrategic region of Central Asian countries is on the "crossroads of Russia, the Middle East, South Asia and the far East"<sup>2</sup>.

In post-Soviet Central Asia, threat to security has emerged due to drug trafficking. Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have important opium routes and

Kyrgyzstan has emerged as major drug importer after Myanmar and Thailand. India and Central Asia has regular exchange of high level dignitaries to devise strategies to combat the security threats. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have formed "strategic partnership" with India. There is need of strengthening India-Central Asian relations for combating the drug and narcotic trafficking which is an important source of instability for India, Central Asia, and Russia in particular and region and the world in general.

Katherine Foshko,<sup>3</sup> stresses that source of heroine in Central Asia is Afghanistan and illegal drugs passing through the countries of Central Asia is a source of security threat. Heroine trade has become a huge illegal source of income in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Russia has become the victim of drugs which causes 30,000 deaths per year. In case of India, it is the largest producer of opium for pharmaceutical markets, necessary for India but an undetermined amount of drugs goes to international drug markets. This becomes a transit point of illicit narcotic transfer to Western countries bordering the countries of Central Asia. This trade is not in control of local authorities of Central Asia because of money and it is estimated that this trade brings

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\$20 billion a year to the region and benefits the rural Afghans and Taliban militants. Narcotic related corruption undermines the authority of Central Asian countries. In Kyrgyzstan after the removal of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the interim Rosa Otunbayeva government decided to reinstate the anti- drug watch dog with United Nations.

**Afghanistan factor**

The heroin of Afghanistan reaches Western Europe via Iran, Turkey and Balkan states. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have their own professional anti- drug organisations. But the cooperation with India, Russia and with regional organisation is necessary to control drug and narcotic trafficking. The money earned from drugs is used to promote terrorism in India and the Central Asian countries.

Processing of Opium into heroin is now taking place in Afghanistan and a vast quantity of this is trafficked through the countries of Central Asia. Kazakhstan becomes a transit country through which drug is sold to other countries. Afghanistan factor is strongly working as a source of drug trafficking in Central Asian countries. "Currently, Afghanistan is by far the largest producer of opium in the world. The large production of

opium leads to large amounts of heroin being transported around the world. Afghanistan plays a large role in the "Balkan route", which transports around 90% of the world's heroin, mostly passing through Russia or Western Europe first"<sup>4</sup>.

"Central Asia's geographical proximity to Afghanistan is the most important factor affecting regional drug trafficking. Approximately 30 percent of the drugs produced in Afghanistan—an annual average of 120 tons or more, primarily heroin—are transported through Central Asia. In addition, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the civil war in Tajikistan, and the struggle against the illicit drug trade in Iran have created conditions resulting in increased drug trafficking through Central Asia. In general, drug transit occurs over the borders between Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan<sup>5</sup>."

"Factors that affect drug smuggling in the region and promote drug transit in Central Asian countries include the long common border between Afghanistan and the countries of Central Asia and the increase in demand for narcotics in Central Asia and Russia. Drug trafficking routes in the region tend to connect settlements and pass along common transportation

corridors.<sup>6</sup>”

### **Social and economic consequences**

Social consequence of drug use in Central Asia is rapidly increasing AIDS and drug related crimes. The weakest states of Central Asia like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan face severe threat due to drug and narcotic trade which have adverse impact on their economy, polity and society. Thirty percent of Tajikistan’s gross domestic product is acquired due to drug trafficking. This leads to social crimes like corruption. In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan the involvement of a great number of government officials in drug trafficking provides a depressing scenario.

Fergana Valley poses severe threat due to various organised crimes including drug trafficking<sup>7</sup>. Drug trafficking is an emerging social problem, spreading rapidly and as a consequence corrupting the fabric of society. Drug trafficking constitutes both natural and manufactured drugs and includes Cannabis, hallucinogens, stimulants, narcotics, depressants, anti-depressants, anti-psychotics and so on. Heroin, Cannabis and opium are abused substances in the countries of Central Asia.

Drugs are transformed from less

developed part of the world to more advanced part of the world resulting in drug addiction by the common people. Drug trafficking has social as well as economic impact. Unemployment, poverty and political instability becomes a cause of spreading and increasing drug trafficking. An alternative source of earning of poppy cultivator would help to control this threat to some extent.

Currently, Indian Home Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh said that India faces a serious challenge because of drug trafficking due to its proximity to major opium-growing areas of the region and the agencies concerned are dealing with it effectively.<sup>8</sup> Addressing South Asia Sub-Regional Drug Focal Point Meeting and Drug Demand Reduction expert group consultation Mr. Rajnath Singh said that the global society is facing serious consequences of drug abuse and it undermines the socio-economic and political stability and sustainable development. He also said that involvement of various terrorist groups and syndicates in drug trafficking leads to threat to the national security and sovereignty of states by way of narco-terrorism<sup>9</sup>”.

It may be mentioned that in India, opium is cultivated in Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Arunachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Karnataka

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Debagarh district of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Routes of drug trafficking are established in Afghanistan-Pakistan-Punjab, Xinjiang region of China in the East, Mongolia, Caucasian in the west, Russia to Western European Countries.

“Illegal drug production occurs in all Central Asian countries. Drug producers in the region mainly grow hashish and marijuana from wild Indian hemp. The primary cultivation areas include the Chu Valley, which is located in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and encompasses approximately 170,000 hectares; and the Issyk-Kul district of Kyrgyzstan, which encompasses approximately 6,000 hectares. In addition, a vast quantity of “light” drugs are produced in Central Asia. Most output occurs in Kazakhstan, and Russia is the main consumer of these drugs”<sup>10</sup>.

“The industrial production of semi-synthetic drugs is increasing in Central Asia, especially in Kazakhstan. Shymkent in Kazakhstan, for example, is home to a factory for producing morphine, codeine, and other opiates”<sup>11</sup>.

### **Narco Terrorism**

Narco terrorism is defined as drug

business and terrorism which are closely interlinked. The drug trade became an illegal source of funding for terrorism and host of studies reveal that it is a source of finance for Taliban in Afghanistan.

The studies reveal that drug trafficking has become a source of funding for radical Islamic groups and also finances of terror network<sup>12</sup>. Drug trafficking works as a financial source for terrorism and also provides finances to the extremist Islamic terror group.

Links have been established between international terrorist groups and drug trade which is posing a serious threat to mankind. There is a link between drug trafficking, terrorist and insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Globally, there is evidence that individuals belonging to or sympathetic to international terrorist groups have turned to the drug trade as a source of revenue. The political- military terrorist groups use money raised from drug trade as self-financing projects and use it for acquisition of their weapons, arms and other material. Apart from this, the terrorist groups are actively participating in various criminal activities.

Drugs are transported from developing countries to developed

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countries because developing countries do not have technology to process these drugs but the developed countries do have the technology to process it. The cost of drugs in developed countries is very high in comparison to developing countries.

In India opium and *ganja* is cultivated in the dense forests. It is transported under oil tankers and the material is bound properly with polythene. This is extensively cultivated under the base regions of Himalayas. It goes unnoticed of police because the flowers can smell only upto 4 to 5 km and not beyond that. Apart from this, corruption of officials and governmental machinery is responsible for spreading this menace in the society.

### **Controlling the menace**

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between India and Central Asian countries is necessary for controlling the drug and narcotic trafficking. Joint mechanism is necessary between security agencies of these countries to deal with this menace. Apart from this, public consciousness equally is necessary to stop drug and narcotic trafficking.

India and Central Asian countries have to enhance their law enforce-

ment capacity to control the drug and narcotic trafficking and its related crimes.

There is need to strengthen the role of regional organisation (special reference to SCO) to combat this menace. The SCO was created to fight against drug trafficking and religious extremism. At the Tashkent summit in 2004, the member states of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) signed "Agreement on cooperation in combating illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors" to fight against drug trafficking.

Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC) "was established in 2009 to develop collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the counter narcotic initiatives of various countries within the region. Although CARICC is headquartered in Almaty, Kazakhstan, participant countries include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan". "These Central Asian states share intelligence regarding transnational drug trafficking networks, thus boosting their regional criminal justice and security systems. At the end of 2009, the results of CARICC

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were already beginning to show in which various new trafficking networks were identified, new arrests were made, and over 100 kg of heroin was seized<sup>13</sup>.

Drug users in India, Central Asian countries and Russia are increasing. There is need of open Counselling centres for rehabilitation and social stability of drug users. Treatment and rehabilitation is necessary for drug addicted persons. The role of NGO's in this area is needed to be strengthened.

"In terms of efforts to curb drug trafficking, UNODC assists countries in training law enforcement to better detect the trade and production of illegal drugs<sup>14</sup>."

Since the terror groups are actively taking part in drug trafficking, so India

"pressed for bringing international and domestic laws in sync for real deterrence and prevent those involved from going scot-free because of lack of consonance between the laws of different nations"<sup>15</sup>.

Though drug is a trans-national phenomenon, Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh said "international and domestic laws should be so legislated that they are in sync and coherent so as to act as a real deterrent for the drug traffickers, who otherwise are able to go scot-free because of lack of consonance between the laws of different countries." Due to the location of India being close to major opium-growing areas of the region "India is facing serious menace of drug trafficking and as a spillover effect, drug abuse especially among the youth"<sup>16</sup>. ■

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