
DRUG TRAFFICKING AND DRUG ADDICTION IN NORTH-EAST INDIA: A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS OF THE NDPS ACT, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGE

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ABSTRACT

Drug addiction is a major issue in our society, with startling figures indicating that roughly 60% of people are addicted to substances like nicotine, alcohol and other drugs. Many of these chemicals are regulated via the illicit trade in narcotics, such as opium, cannabis, brown sugar, heroin and cocaine which is still expanding. The word narcotic is derived from the Greek word narcosis, which means “numbness.” As the ancient Greek physician Galen pointed out, these drugs numb pain and can induce a lack of feeling. The usage of drugs among teenagers and young adults is on the rise nowadays and is a serious global health concern. Often, addiction is rooted in life disturbances. Obstacles in schooling, hardships in employment and dispute in family connections may produce mental pressure. People use substances to console themselves when they go through serious mental breakdown or difficulty. Such weakness is leading towards a significant divide between parents and children or when the parents are not able to spend enough time with their offsprings. It is also interesting to note that in India the main addictive chemicals, such as Bhang and marijuana (Ganja), which are derivatives of the cannabis plant, are commonly associated with religious faith. Bhang is legal but other cannabis byproduct such as marijuana and opium are not. The Far-Reaching Consequences The growing demand and supply of narcotics not only destroys human being but also spreads even to national security, communities and families. To suppress this, India created the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 (NDPS Act)¹. The international agreements have been enhanced by the passage of the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, which aims to establish a strict framework for the regulation of activities of drugs.

¹ NDPS Act 1985.

A medico-legal point of view

Narcotics are also employed as medicines, mainly to relieve pain and as anaesthetics. It is also used to create cough syrups and is an ingredient in such goods, although its use is tightly controlled to prevent experimental use and addiction. Reliance on these items and substances often results in dangerous behaviours, including the sharing of non-sterile needles when injecting drugs. Which leads to life threatening diseases like Hepatitis B, AIDS, renal damage and brain haemorrhage. Date cough syrup is also used for addiction beyond date.

Rainbow Fentanyl is a new and scary hazard. This drug, chemically altered, is inexpensive and easy to get, which makes it especially deadly. It has been in India for comparatively little time, the last 7-8 years. It is made in China and transported easily into India through the porous North-Eastern borders, sources said. On July 2023 20 persons were arrested by the police and 17 mobile phones seized as well as 6 motorcycles and a large quantity of brown sugar. The fear is Tripura is drowning in the deep ocean of narcotics. The future of the youths is being wrecked. The infection of drug addiction is spreading from rural to urban and from hills to lowlands. This virus is transmitted by narcotics smugglers. A state which is famous for its small hill stations and greenery is drowning in the sea of drug addiction .The toxic narcotics are taking countless youths' lives.The state government though advocates and advertises for a drug free Tripura or Nesha mukto Tripura, but the police and some local leaders by showing thumb to the system is somehow running the smuggling business without any worry. A lot of news media are publishing several accounts of death and organ damage, maximum of them are between 15-30 years of age. In my study I have met poor farmers who, because of low revenues from traditional crops, have begun to grow cannabis on their land. Fifty per cent of India's cannabis cultivation takes place in the North-East, followed by Himachal, Jharkhand and Orissa, says a crime writer based in the region. This harsh reality is a demonstration of how the lack of living and job may force people to illicit activity. The NDPS Act prescribes heavy punishment for acts related to drugs but is determined by the quantity of drugs that has been confiscated and is labelled as "small quantity", "intermediate quantity" and "commercial quantity". differential in Mg and g, which ensures a rigorous strategy for seizure.

The Main causes of drug Addiction

1. Economic Pressures-Money or the lack of it plays a massive role in mental stability. The "Crash": A sudden financial failure or commercial failure can plunge a person into serious

despair due to the shock and loss of status. Drugs are a means to dull that financial “sting.” The Void of Unemployment Joblessness hurts more than the wallet; it kills regularity and purpose. Unemployment is boring and stressful, so drugs are an easy, but destructive, escape.

2. Medical ‘accidents’ Sometimes addiction starts in a doctor’s office. Prescription Dependence For example, heavy-duty cough syrups (including alcohol or codeine) or sleeping tablets are intended to be used in the short-term. But the “calm” they bring is frequently too addicting for patients to relinquish, and dependence is disguised as healthcare.

3. Social Dynamics. Our choices are influenced by our environment, the people we love (or want acceptance from).

Family Gaps: Busy families with parents who work long hours often feel emotionally neglected by their children. Without the home 'anchor', individuals are more apt to fall into substance usage. The Peer Trap The drive to fit in is a basic human instinct. It’s not just “cool” students in school or co-workers at work, but the pressure to “just try it” is one of the major causes for children from all economic levels.

4. Mental Scars -Addiction is often an attempt to “self-medicate” underlying misery.

Heartbreak & Loss: Divorces and heartbreaks leave an empty space that some try to fill with narcotics. Childhood Trauma: Growing up in a home with a lot of strife or suffering early trauma is a big stressor. For many, it’s not really about fun, but about finally feeling “quiet” within.

5. Socio Cultural Beliefs -Sometimes, things are embedded in the very core of our traditions.

Cultural Symbols: In some cultures, substances like Bhang or Ganja are associated with holy figures (such as Lord Shiva), and some people feel that consumption is a kind of worship. **Social Rituals:** The placing of alcohol in a variety of religious or social ceremonies can normalise alcohol, making it seem “holy” or “essential” rather than a narcotic.

6. Access and Curiosity Not every reason is a tragedy, sometimes it’s just human nature and terrible luck. The " Experiment " : A lot of young folks are just curious . They want to see what all this “hype” is about. Ease of Access: If drugs are easy to find and your friends are using

them, the barrier for entry is essentially non-existent. A one-time “experience” can swiftly turn into a lifelong habit.

NORTH-EAST AS A DOOR TO THE PADDLERS

India’s Northeast – bordering Tripura, Assam, Manipur, Bangladesh, Bhutan and China – sits astride some of Asia’s busiest narcotics corridors. In 2024-25, the region has seen a marked uptick in drug recoveries, especially methamphetamine (WY/Yaba) tablets and Heroin No. 4, flowing from the North east via Tripura, Assam, Manipur. Daily headlines of interdictions in Mizoram, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Sikkim, paint a picture of both intensifying trafficking and increasingly coordinated enforcement.

Customs data released on June 26, 2025, indicates that narcotics now constitute 29 percent of all seizures in the Northeast – surpassing cigarettes (25 per cent), areca nut (24 per cent) and gold (11 per cent) – with estimated narcotics seizure values hitting INR 571,840,000 in the first half of 2025. Amphetamine-type stimulants, particularly Yaba tablets brewed in Tripura, Assam, Manipur’s Golden Triangle, have entered the fray in escalating quantities; 58 kilograms were seized in just the first half of 2025, compared to 20 kilograms in the entirety of 2023-24. This surge is fuelling the shift toward narco-terrorism, with insurgent groups like the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and Kukis/Zomis, leveraging narcotics proceeds to fund arms, camps, recruitment and training, effectively weaponizing local populations. A Manipur Police report revealed that in Manipur alone, between March 2022 and May 2023, narcotics worth INR 1,420 million were seized across over 764 cases, with a marked uptick in addiction-induced public health crises and dual epidemics including HIV-particularly driven by injecting drug use. Insurgent groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB), United National Liberation Front (UNLF), and Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), have long relied on drug trafficking and extortion as revenue streams. NSCN, for instance, reportedly retains 70 per cent of drug-derived profit and distributes the remainder to allied outfits. HNLC has also been known to operate cross-border enterprises, including betel nut plantations in Bangladesh, with earlier trade and arms links reportedly facilitated via the Indo-Tripura, Assam, Manipur border. On **August 27, 2025, Mizoram’s Excise and Narcotics Minister Lalnghinghlova Hmar** informed the State Assembly that at least 351 people, including 46 women, have lost their lives in Mizoram due to drug abuse since 2020. He added

that, between 2020 and August 8, 2025, 78 people died of heroin abuse, while 273 others succumbed to multiple drug use. The victims were aged between 19 and 57 years. The highest number of such deaths was reported in 2023, with 76 fatalities, followed by 67 each in 2020 and 2024. From January to August 8, 2025, alone, 51 people, including seven women, died of drug abuse, he added. Among the state's 11 districts, Aizawl reported the highest number of deaths at 274, followed by Lunglei with 69 and Champhai, bordering Tripura, Assam, Manipur, with 58. Hnahthial recorded the lowest with just one case. During the same period, the Excise and Narcotics Department seized narcotics worth INR 1,524.3 million, including 212.98 kilograms of heroin, 568.99 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 1,566.66 kilograms of ganja. A total of 4,400 people had been arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, Hmar added. Mizoram has long grappled with drug abuse and trafficking due to its proximity to Tripura, Assam, Manipur, with which it shares a 510-kilometre porous border. According to Police data, 185 Tripura, Assam, Manipur nationals have been arrested for drug smuggling between 2020 and May 2025.

On August 30, 2025, 3 persons – Neeraj Kumar (26), Jyoti Kumari (25) and Hashna Begum (26) – were arrested at the Agartala Railway Station in West Tripura District of Tripura then the local Police has a seizure of almost 29.140 kgs of weed valued at around INR 400,000 from their possession.

On August 29, 2025, Assam Rifles, in a joint operation with the Special Narcotics Police Station, Aizawl, arrested two persons and seized methamphetamine tablets worth INR 210 million, in the Zemabawk South area of the Aizawl District of Mizoram.

On August 29, 2025, security forces (SFs) arrested a drug smuggler, Paogoulal Touthang (22), in the Hengbung Police Outpost area under the Senapati Police Station of Senapati District in Manipur. 205 soap cases of Brown Sugar weighing 2.816 kilograms were seized from his possession. On August 29, 2025, the Arunachal Pradesh Police arrested a 21-year-old suspected drug peddler, Nobu Lamnio from Niti Vihar in Itanagar in the Papum Pare District of Arunachal Pradesh, and seized nine vials containing suspected heroin weighing 5.65 grams.

On August 28, 2025, SFs seized 9.6 lakh methamphetamine tablets valued at INR 1.44 billion, during a joint operation by the Border Security Force (BSF) under Sector Headquarters, Aizawl, and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), in the Serchhip District of Mizoram, and arrested three persons. Officials said this marked the second-largest methamphetamine haul in

Mizoram in the past three years, highlighting the state's continued vulnerability to cross-border drug trafficking.

On August 28, 2025, SFs arrested Henkhokai Singson (32) from Mulargao village under the Jiribam Police Station in the Jiribam District of Manipur, and recovered two soap cases containing contraband brown sugar, from his possession.

On August 26, 2025, the Manipur Police arrested a woman, Manneihoi Baite (49), in possession of 1,200 World is Yours (WY) or Yaba tablets (Meth laced with caffeine) worth INR 1,000,000 from S. Munnuam in the Churachandpur District of Manipur.²

On August 26, 2025, SFs arrested five persons – Kaigunlal Haokip (22), Dalzagin (47), Seigoulal Haokip (32), Thangkhohao (34 and Samuel (30) – from Behiang and Bualkot villages in the Churachandpur District of Manipur, and recovered 56 soap cases of Heroin No.4 (approximately 728 grams).

On August 26, 2025, the Assam Police arrested one person and seized 417 grams of heroin with a locally estimated value of INR 28 million, from the Lakhimpur area of the Cachar District of Assam.

On August 26, 2025, the Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) of Meghalaya Police arrested two persons – Hajrat Umar (28) and Phulchand Ali – and seized 137.86 grams of heroin with a locally estimated value of around INR 60,000,00 at the Umkiang Police Patrol Post under the Lumshnong Police Station in the East Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya.

On August 25, 2025, the Tripura Police arrested two Bihari men – Sonu Kumar (31) and Suman Kumar Gupta (34) – from Agartala Railway Station in the West Tripura District of Tripura, and recovered 8.45 kilograms of Ganja (marijuana), estimated to be worth around INR 170,000

On October 15 2025, In a major crackdown on illegal arms and narcotics in Tripura, the Indian Army reportedly carried out an active field operation in Mohanpur, leading to the arrest of Sanjit Saha, a close aide of Mohanpur MLA and Minister Ratan Nath, who is widely recognised

² Afsara Shaheen *India: Narco-Terrorism Nexus In Northeast – Analysis* Sept 3, 2025. .

for his nationalist affiliations.³

According to reports, security forces conducted a late-night raid at Saha's residence and recovered a substantial cache of illegal weapons and narcotic substances. The seized items allegedly included a pistol, more than 100 rounds of 9mm ammunition, and a considerable quantity of drugs. Following the operation, the accused was initially taken to Mohanpur Police Station and later shifted to NCC Police Station for further investigation. Sources further stated that Saha is expected to be produced before a magistrate today. The success of the operation has largely been attributed to the Indian Army's direct involvement and coordinated action. Although the Army reportedly played the leading role in exposing the illegal stockpile, local sources alleged that the police remained largely passive during the operation and its immediate aftermath. The raid is being termed as one of the biggest seizures of illicit weaponry and narcotics in Tripura in recent times, to highlight the expanding role of the central security forces in dealing with organised crime activities and drug-related offences across the state. This comes amid heightened anti-narcotics measures in the entire Northeastern region. The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) on 29 May 2025 said that it has seized narcotic contraband worth nearly INR 1,730 million in the Northeast since January 2025 leading to 26 arrests, illustrating the alarming nature of trafficking challenge in the region. Earlier, Chief Minister Lalduhoma had linked the entry of narcotics with Mizoram's proximity to the North east, the region covering northeastern Tripura, Assam, Manipur, Bangladesh and NEPAL, known for drug manufacturing and distribution. Likewise, a report published by the Meghalaya Government on August 21, 2025 indicated that from 2020 to 2025, Meghalaya's (ANTF) seized drugs worth more than INR 4,120 million, which included 41 kilograms of heroin, 1,056 kilograms of ganja, two kilograms of opium, 75 kilograms of Yaba tablets, 14 kilograms of crystal meth, 16 kilograms of other psychotropic substances, and 124,906 bottles of codeine syrup. Total Arrests: 1,061 Superintendent Giri Prasad M., ANTF said half of the seized drugs were burnt at Lumshnong and there has been an increase in seizures over the last three years.

According to the latest data shared by the Government of India (GoI), the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has documented 116 big cases between 2020 and May 2025 which has led to the seizure of almost 109,318 kg of drugs. As per NCB Annual Report 2023-24, the enforcement intensity was at its peak with the law enforcement agencies of the country under

³ TRIPURAINFO.COM *Indian Army Leads Major Operation in Tripura: Illegal Arms and Drugs Seized from Mohanpur BJP Leader's Residence* By Our Correspondent October 15 2025.

the jurisdiction of NCB seizing drugs worth ₹25,330 crore in 2024, a 55 percent rise from 16,100 crore in 2023. It is important to note that there is no comprehensive data base for narcotics seizures in North East India. State Police, Customs, DRI and NCB etc. maintain distinct records pertaining to their respective operations encompassing different jurisdictions. Consequently, official data are neither comparable nor integrated. For example, Customs data for the first half of 2025 shows that narcotics worth INR 571,840,000 were seized whereas DRI recorded seizures valued at INR 1,730 million over the same period. Likewise, Mizoram and Meghalaya's State Police and Excise Departments have claimed further recovery of thousands of kgs and billions of rupees. While some reports show seizures of several billion rupees, across several agencies, integrated data is lacking and the real scale of drugs inflows is underestimated. What is evident, however, is that there is a distinct upwards trajectory of trafficking activities, as evidenced by record seizures and networks that are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Additional Director General (ADG) of Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) Nawal Bajaj said on June 26, 2025, the drug crisis in Northeast India is no longer limited to cross-border trafficking, there is a spike in local synthetic drug manufacture and cyber-enabled marketplaces. He said that the domestic manufacture of methamphetamine, aided by the availability of precursor chemicals and internet-based tutorials, has become a big concern, with youth aged <28 years being the predominant makers and consumers. Further facilitation is provided by artificial intelligence (AI) tools and darknet marketplaces, resulting in a highly decentralised drug trade. Today, law enforcement agencies have sophisticated data systems like NCORD (Narcotics Coordination Centre), the NIDAAN (National Integrated Database on Arrested Narco-offenders) database, the Crime & Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) and special task forces monitoring darknet and crypto-based drug markets. The Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States (MANAS) helpline and the like allow the public to report, suggesting a multi-pronged approach involving digital surveillance, inter-agency cooperation and public participation.

The growing trend of drug seizures across Northeast India is reflective of a grave security issue as drugs trafficking meets insurgency, organised crime and trans-border vulnerability. The physical proximity of the province to the Golden Triangle, porous borders and socio-political volatility, makes it a vital node in the worldwide drugs supply chain. Enhanced interdiction efforts – evidenced by record seizures of heroin, methamphetamine and synthetic substances – demonstrate increased enforcement capabilities but also expose the volume of illicit flows and the changing tactics of trafficking networks. Additionally, the related boom in local production,

commerce enabled by the darknet, and funding of insurgency activities through narcotics further compound the link between drug trafficking and narco-terrorism, undermining state control and destabilising fragile socio-economic frameworks. This trend has a twofold challenge, to ensure national security and address public health concerns related with drug usage. The increasing data points to the need for a multi-sectoral strategy in the struggle against narco-terrorism; not just more law enforcement, but also border control, financial surveillance, international co-operation and community driven de-addiction activities. Without such an integrated approach, the Northeast runs the possibility of becoming a trafficking hub and a theatre of narco-fuelled insurgency, with ramifications that go well beyond the limits of India, into the larger Indo-Tripura, Assam, Manipur area, and even into the global security infrastructures.