

Drugs like Ecstasy 'emerging threat' to India: UN official

Party drugs like Ecstasy are becoming an emerging threat to India, a top UN official has said.

'The problem of synthetic drugs such as Ecstasy in India is simmering and we have to be extra cautious about it. This is not an epidemic yet but a new emerging threat to India,' Rajiv Walia, project coordinator with the UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), said in an interview in the run-up to June 26, the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

'It is a new peril but it has certainly not spread to the same extent as it has in Southeast Asian countries, [Europe](#) and the US,' Walia told IANS in an interview.

Synthetic drugs like Ephedrine, Amphetamines and Methaqualone are known by many names such as Ecstasy, MDMA, Adam, XTC, love drug and hug. They are often abused during parties.

According to Walia, these drugs are a combination of psychoactive drugs that have stimulant and hallucinogenic qualities and are similar to other street drugs known for causing brain damage. They also damage the body by raising its temperature, which can cause muscle breakdown and heart and kidney failure.

Asked about how these drugs reach India, he said most were smuggled from Myanmar. Although the total quantity available in India was not large yet, Walia warned against complacency. 'There have been seizures of synthetic drugs, especially party drugs, in metropolitan cities in India,' he pointed out.

According to Walia, seizure of narcotics in India during the past few years suggests that local drugs like ganja and hashish - derivatives of opium - continue to be abused most often, as they are cheap and easily available.

'India is the only country currently producing opium for medical and scientific purposes. But despite the best controls, certain quantities do flow into the illicit channel although the extent is very difficult to determine.'

Walia added that heroin trailed ganja and hashish in the top drug race, but by and large its abuse was restricted to urban areas and the transit routes of smugglers.

Cocaine abuse too appeared to be confined to the urban elite, he said. Going by the quantity of drugs seized in the last 10 years, Walia felt that there had been no major upsurge in drug abuse, though there was a slight upward trend.

Drug enforcement officials throughout the world have a rule of thumb - the quantity of drugs seized by the authorities is about 10 percent of the quantity being smuggled.

Going by that, an average of 10 tonnes of heroin have been smuggled into India every year over the past decade, Walia said. Some of it was smuggled in from the Myanmar border and the rest from Afghanistan via Pakistan.

But India was a relatively small player in the smuggling of heroin out of Afghanistan, Walia felt, since

that country produced an average of 610 tonnes of heroin every year.

He stressed that the number of specially trained people in various drug law enforcement agencies should be increased to fight the menace more effectively.

The UNODC (www.unodc.org) runs various courses to train people in police and paramilitary forces as well as specialised drug law enforcement agencies. It also provides specialised equipment to the authorities.

(June 26 is International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking)

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