

# A den of narco-terrorism

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*One of the most frightening aspect of the prevalence of drug addiction is that it is promoted by the drug peddlers. The drug trafficking is also linked with the forces of terrorism. The details contained in this article are revealing and need to be seriously noted.*

*This article came in our hand as we were going to press. It was sent by a well wisher of Ishani and the one who is actively engaged in the de-addiction initiatives.*

— Editor

During the past decade-and-a-half that I have known the North-East region, including five years I spent there, some of the most heart-wrenching stories, apart from those about insurgency movements degenerating into terrorism, were those of the spectre of drug-addiction; of how the lives of many youngsters were ruined, or even lost, because of addiction to the dreaded heroin. It is sharing of needles to inject heroin, which caused the rampant spread of AIDS in that region and it is this disease, which snuffed out many a young life.

Mizzima News Group (a news agency of the democratic movement in Myanmar, banned by its military government), based in New Delhi, recently conducted a survey of areas in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland and Assam, as well as Namphalong in Myanmar, and published a report of the current status of cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption of drugs in that region. The old linkage between narcotics and terrorism is that the money earned by cultivation, production and trafficking is used for procuring weapons for underground groups.



**A poppy field in Arunachal Pradesh**

In Arunachal Pradesh, opium has traditionally been cultivated by five tribes – Wanchu, Tangsha, Adi, Khamti and Mishimi – ever since they lived in the hilly areas covering Tirap, Changlang, Lohit and Upper Siang districts, almost all dominated by militant groups. Lack of basic infrastructure deprives the populace of education with the literacy rate, unlike in many other North-East states being only 2 to 10 per cent. This affects health-care too. Ninety per cent of Lohit's population is involved in opium cultivation

making it the highest producer out of the districts mentioned. While a 1999 survey of Arunachal recorded a 15,000 drug addicts, updated figures are not available.

The Customs Department and other law-enforcement agencies, which destroyed 50 and 218 hectares of poppy crops in 1999 and 2001 respectively, have not been able to proceed further owing to the presence of terrorist groups of other states.

Manipur, sharing 300 kms of a porous border with Burma, though steeped in culture, is unfortunately suffering from the twin scourges of terrorist type violence and AIDS, spread mainly by heroin addicts sharing needles. The main violent groups operating in the state are: the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF), the Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL ) and the Kuki National Liberation Front (KNLF). They have been indulging in frequent killings and kidnappings, severely hampering peace and much needed and overdue progress of development in the state.

According to the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), at least two of these groups—PLA and UNLF— have been closely associated with drug trafficking, despite their projected stand of fighting drug menace, by frequent public displays of destroying heaps of drugs. The NCB sources state that drug traffickers cooperate with groups which collect money from drug lords and whenever the latter require weapons, they traffic the drugs. The NCB added the UNLF, which operates from Burma, has strong bases in Namphalong and Tamu (close to Moreh, Manipur's border town) in Sagaing division of that country. *The presence of armed groups facilitates drug-trafficking and villagers are at the mercy of whoever controls their area.* The drugs which have caused maximum damage are heroin, morphine and even the injectable version of Proxyvon. Diazepan, Nitrazipan, Lobain, Amphetamine - like substances (ATS), opium and cannabis as well as even after-shave lotions and dendrites are available and used.

*Nagaland is reported to be the second worst state in drug consumption.* Ironically, while opium is not known to be grown in Nagaland, since the 18th century or so, it is traditionally served to guests as a token of respect in some tribes of Mon Phek and Tuensang districts, where it comes from Burma. Opium has commonly been used by many communities all over India as medicine, or even for intoxication, as has been cannabis. But youngsters nowadays are known to prefer many of the substances mentioned earlier, *which come from Burma through Moreh and find their way to Kohima and Dimapur* - a major transit point for heroin trafficking.

NCB sources state that cannabis is grown in the bordering areas of Phek district and that the Sangtham and Chakesang people consume opium during the festive season. The Nagaland Government has set up some de-toxification camps in some towns, but there are parts of districts like Phek and Tuensang, which are so distant that getting updates on the drug situations there is very difficult.

Assam's location as a gateway to the North-East region and the road connections makes it an ideal transit point for trafficking cannabis, or 'ganja', another version, which is also a widely preferred inexpensive intoxicant in the state. The drug trafficking has increased manifold since the advent of the United Liberation Front for Asom (ULFA) in the mid-1980s.

Namphalong, in Burma, is very difficult to report on as the ruling military junta does not normally allow journalists to enter the territory. Heroin in Burma comes from Tamu, Lashio and Myitkina, in the Kachin state and Namphalong, which has emerged as a major commercial centre. According to sources, Namphalong lacks adequate schools and

colleges. With the literacy rate being very low and druglords wielding a lot of power, it is difficult to create awareness of the detrimental effects of drugs.

So far narco-terrorism in the infamous Golden Triangle has flourished with no hopes of any respite. A very determined, concerted and sustained drive by all the countries concerned is required for the menace to be tackled. Given the present security scenario of South and South-East Asia, a beginning will have to be made: sooner, the better.

*Source : [www.dayafterindia.com](http://www.dayafterindia.com)*

*Italics in this article by the editor, ISHANI*

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