

Legalising Marijuana in India

Why in news?

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Women and Child Development Minister has suggested legalising marijuana in India for medical purposes.

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What is Marijuana?

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- Marijuana is a psychoactive drug from the Cannabis plant used for medical, recreational & religious purposes.

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- Cannabis can be used by smoking, vaporization, within food, or as an extract.

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- It creates mental and physical effects, such as a "high" or "stoned" feeling, a general change in perception, and an increase in appetite.

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- 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.

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- Long term side effects may include addiction, decreased mental ability and behavioural problems in children whose mothers used cannabis during pregnancy.

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What is its historic significance in India?

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- Cannabis has been used since ancient times in India, dating back to 2000 BCE.

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- The cannabis plant has been mentioned as one of the five sacred plants in the Vedas.

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- Bhang, an edible preparation of cannabis, which is 'consumed either in the form of a drink or smoked' is common during the Hindu festivals of Holi and Mahashivaratri.

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What are its medicinal qualities?

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- There has been no rigorous scientific testing of the medicinal properties of cannabis due to restrictive laws.

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- There is considerable evidence though, supporting its use in the treatment of chemotherapy - induced nausea and vomiting, neuropathic pain, and multiple sclerosis.

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- Lower levels of evidence support its use for AIDS, wasting syndrome, epilepsy, rheumatoid arthritis, and glaucoma.

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What is its legal status?

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- The possession, use, and sale of cannabis are illegal in most countries as a result of an agreement in the 'International Opium Convention' (1925).

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- Indian government banned the use of cannabis by passing the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act-1985.

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- The rigour of restrictive laws & its implementation varies greatly across countries.

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- Canada, Belgium, Australia, the Netherlands, Spain, and several U.S. states are some territories where medical use of cannabis is legal.

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- Netherlands (1976) & some US states (recently) have allowed for the

recreational use of marijuana.

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What do the doctors say?

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- The opinion among medical practitioners in India is divided.
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- Some are of the opinion that, it is a better alternative to alcohol & tobacco consumption.
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- While supporters claim that denying medical use of marijuana is a violation of 'Right to life', others believe it is not all that important a drug for Palliative Care.
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- Most doctors advocate caution, as a wrongly worded policy could potentially aggravate substance abuse among youngsters.

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