

## **Punjab's War on Drugs**

### **Why in news?**

\n\n

Amid a new wave of political churn against the government for failing to curtail drugs, the Punjab CM has sought to enhance punishment for offenders.

\n\n

### **How has the Punjab government's crackdown on drugs progressed?**

\n\n

\n

- In accordance with his campaign, immediately after assuming office, Punjab CM set up a "Special Task Force" (STF) against drugs.

\n

- STF began by arresting thousands of peddlers.

\n

- Within four weeks, the CM and the STF chief announced that the pre-election promise had been fulfilled, and supplies choked.

\n

- Notably, the last one year has seen the "arrest of 19,000 drug peddlers and treatment of more than 2 lakh drug victims".

\n

- Narcotic Drugs & Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act has also been involved in many cases with over 4,000 convictions already secured under the act.

\n

- Additionally, over 5,600 NDPS cases are under trial, and Punjab has recorded an impressive 82% conviction rate under NDPS.

\n

\n\n

### **What are the recent developments?**

\n\n

\n

- **Protests** - Despite the initial intensive crackdown, the drug problem

seems to persisting in Punjab, and reports actually suggesting an increase in drug abuse.

\n

- A video of a woman wailing next to the body of her son who lies in a heap of garbage with a syringe still stuck in his veins has created a sensation.
- Allegedly, there has also been a spurt in drug-related deaths, which is causing a political churn, with opposition parties voicing against the government.
- While the government is believed to be under-reporting drug related deaths due to immense pressure, it has nonetheless asserted a stern crackdown.
- **Reaction** - Punjab CM has written to the union government, seeking to enhance punishment under the NDPS Act to deter drug abuse.
- He has sought to bring in the death penalty for first-time offenders, besides declaring that government employees must undergo drug screening.
- But a previous Bombay High Court judgement had held death penalty under NDPS Act as unconstitutional, thereby making the CM's demand look naive.

\n

\n\n

## **What are the important initiatives to curtail the drug menace?**

\n\n

\n

- **DAPO Project** - In March, the government launched "Drug Abuse Prevention Officer" (DAPO) project, a community participation programme.
- Thousands volunteered registered as DAPOs to raise awareness and the government also leveraged its 3.5 lakh officials as DAPOs.
- The effectiveness of the exercise is yet to be evaluated.
- **Buddy Project** - The Special Task Force (STF) designed a "buddy project", aiming to include all schools and colleges for student awareness.

\n

- It has been launched in some areas and STF officers say it will soon be extended across the state and encompasses parents and teachers too.  
\n
- **OOAT Program** - Health department has opened about 81 “Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment” (OOAT) clinics for opium and heroin addicts.  
\n
- This program is running since May and addicts are for the time-being given buprenorphine (an opioid substitute).  
\n
- **Confiscation Act** - Last year, the Cabinet had decided to enact the “Confiscation of Drug Dealers Property Act”.  
\n
- This could not take off as the home department informed the CMO that a similar provision already exists under the NDPS Act.  
\n

\n\n

### **What are the challenges that the STF is facing?**

\n\n

- The STF was to directly report to the CM’s office, overlooking the State DGP and other police hierarchy.  
\n
- This created some tussle, which reached its peak when the STF questioned an SP and also arrested a police inspector on drug charges.  
\n
- These skirmishes visibly slowed down STF’s work and subsequently it was place back within the police hierarchy (reporting to the DGP).  
\n
- Earlier this year, the government issued a notification to exclude STF from the RTI, as it was facing pressure to release sensitive information.  
\n
- STF also had to face political headwinds as it had to inquire into the alleged involvement of an ex-minister from the SAD party in a drug mesh.  
\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: Indian Express**

\n



**SHANKAR**  
**IAS PARLIAMENT**  
*Information is Empowering*