
Book Review

India braces for new Dope, Inc. assault

by Susan Maitra

The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Laws of India

by B.V. Dumer and R.K. Tewari
Konark Publishers, New Delhi, 1989
615 pages, hardbound, 300 rupees

With no visible letup in the narcotics traffic from the Golden Crescent on India's western borders, and a record 1990 opium harvest projected for the Golden Triangle adjacent to its eastern borders, anti-drug officials here are bracing for another escalation in Dope, Inc.'s assault on India.

The drug lords began targeting India in the early 1980s, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Khomeini Revolution in Iran disrupted trafficking routes from the Golden Crescent. India's cosmopolitan centers like Bombay, and its international air traffic links were convenient, and the virtual non-existence of a law enforcement effort against narcotics trafficking made India an ideal transshipment center. The potential market in a population of 800 million in India itself could not have escaped the notice of the drug barons, either.

Willy-nilly—from 1980 when not a single case of dope peddling was registered, to 1985 when Interpol found India to be the number-one source of heroin coming to Europe—Indian authorities found they had a major problem on their hands. The Khalistani secessionist movement in the state of Punjab that had just claimed the life of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and the escalation of secessionist warfare in the nation of Sri Lanka established the “narco-terrorist” phenomenon as a clear and present danger, and helped to galvanize a quick response from the new administration of Rajiv Gandhi.

This book tells a crucial part of the story of how India has mobilized to try to win the war against Dope, Inc. At the center of the book is the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 (NDPSA) and its 1988 amendment, the sweeping new laws that established the legal and institutional basis for India's anti-drug effort, with annotated commentary. Prefatory chapters outline the drug problem as it

has emerged in India, and describe as well the economic, social, and medical consequences of the drug scourge.

Additionally, the book contains the previous laws in India, those that were superseded by NDPSA, as well as the international laws and conventions that form the worldwide enforcement context. These include the 1961 and 1971 conventions as well as the new, recently adopted United Nations conventions and suggested work program for stepped-up international cooperation to stamp out drugs formulated under the initiative of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir and others.

The book—dedicated “to those who laid down their lives in combatting illicit traffic in drugs”—was written by two individuals who continue to play a central role both behind the desk and in the field in the anti-drug fight in India. B.V. Dumar, a new member at the Central Board of Exise and Customs in the Finance Ministry and former director general of the Revenue Intelligence, was the first head of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) set up by the 1985 law to spearhead the anti-drug fight. Kumar was instrumental in preparing the way for and formulating the tough new anti-drug policy, with the active leadership of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his top adviser Arun Singh. R.K. Tewari has 11 years experience in the work against narcotics both in the field and at the headquarters of the Department of Revenue in the Finance Ministry, and is presently responsible for implementation and enforcement of the NDPSA, policy framing, and coordination of all work relating to narcotics.

The foreigner who will be interested in a comprehensive reference work on India's narcotics laws and their background, cannot perhaps appreciate the significance of this work for the Indian anti-drug effort itself. The authors state that their objective in writing the book is “to inspire the law enforcement agencies to combat drug trafficking on a war-footing and create the necessary awareness amongst the administrators, lawyers, educationists, doctors and judiciary in particular and the citizens in general.” Indeed, this volume is no academic exercise but rather an important weapon in a situation where law enforcement agencies have almost no experience in narcotics work. The awesome task of building up competent narcotics cells in the police forces and among other enforcement agencies, of coordinating their activity and the necessary intelligence infrastructure, and of establishing judicial precedents and so forth—all in a race against time—will be greatly assisted by the existence of this book. Its authors hope it will help to give new impetus to the anti-drug fight.

When this writer met Mr. Kumar recently, he was just back from leading a three-day field expedition that destroyed nearly \$25 million worth of marijuana plants being cultivated illegally in nearly inaccessible mountain tracts at above 6,000 feet along the border between the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Not the first such expedition Kumar has led, he says nonetheless that it's just “the tip of the iceberg.” By Western

standards, at about \$1,000, "Operation Blue Sky" was strictly a low-budget operation. But it was well publicized and clearly meant to send a message to the kingpins, the otherwise respectable businessmen with political connections who operate the dope rackets through a long series of anonymous intermediaries.

What really worries Kumar and his associates now is the loss of momentum which the anti-drug effort has suffered over the past year or so, as the Rajiv Gandhi administration became increasingly preoccupied with the 1989 general elections. The change of government and immediate need for political fire-fighting operations in the state of Jammu and Kashmir further blunted the drive. Fruitful collaboration with Pakistan on the drug problem, begun in 1986 under Rajiv Gandhi's initiative, has also been overcome by political events in both nations; there is every indication that Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has her hands tied as far as a serious anti-drug fight is concerned.

High price for backpedaling

Indian anti-drug officials know that the price for backpedaling at this stage will certainly be high. Kumar notes that India is way behind in conducting the kind of surveys that would show to what extent the country has become a market and not simply a conduit for Dope, Inc.

As the seizure on March 12 in Bombay of nearly 400

kilograms of high-grade morphine from Pakistan and Afghanistan indicates, there is certainly no letup in the traffic from the Golden Crescent. The seizure was the first big success of the newly formed, 38-man narcotics cell in the Bombay police. But as Rahul Sur, chief of the new cell, made clear to *The Independent*, there's no time to bask in the glory. The unit has no infrastructure, such as computer information banks, communications facilities, monitoring hardware, and so forth, and most of the staffers lack the training and expertise for effective field operations.

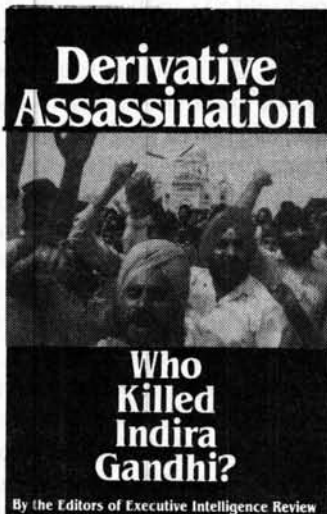
The danger from the east looms as great. Anti-drug officials began zeroing in on the strategically sensitive northeast in 1988. Now, the Golden Triangle opium crop is forecast to be a record-breaker, with "Burmese" opium output alone estimated at 2,600 tons. As Indian officials are well aware, a good chunk of this "Burmese" dope is actually a high-value export from China's Yunnan province—and China is in desperate straits both in terms of politics and foreign exchange. Last year only 72% of the 2.5 tons of heroin seized in India—mostly at airports on its way out to the West—came from the Golden Crescent; the 90% pure "white heroin" for which "Burma" is famous has been showing up in increasing quantity. The seizure of a ship in Bangladesh's Chittagong port recently, with a load of heroin, hemp (marijuana), and 2,500 ampules of banned substance is a pointer to the pressure now coming from the Golden Triangle.

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