



SPEECH
OF
HIS EXCELLENCY
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PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM (RETD)
GOVERNOR,
ARUNACHAL PRADESH
ON THE OCCASION
OF
CONFERENCE ON
“DRUGS IN THE NORTH EAST:
SEARCHING FOR TRUTH & SOLUTIONS”
ORGANISED BY
INSTITUTE FOR NARCOTICS STUDIES & ANALYSIS
AT
DON BOSCO INSTITUTE,
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At the very outset, I would like to congratulate the esteemed members of Institute for Narcotics Studies and Analysis, New Delhi and officials of Government of India for organising this three-day conference on, **“Illicit Drugs in the North East searching for the truth and solutions.”**This conference is very relevant and timely.

INSA has organized this conference to supplement the ongoing governmental and non-governmental efforts to fight the menace of narcotics drugs in the North Eastern region. I am pleased to note that **important issues, like evolution of International drugs Policies and convention, India’s drug laws from 19th century to the new policy of 2012, enforcement policy and execution, illicit cultivation of opium and cannabis in the north east etc. are going to be discussed.** It reflects the genuine attempt of the organisers to go to the root cause of understanding the challenges due to illegal drugs and look at the way ahead in a comprehensive manner.

Participation of eminent personalities, policy makers, women and student groups, government officials from Narcotics Control Bureau, Customs and administration, cultivators, grassroot workers and victims of illicit cultivation in this conference will definitely serve to cross fertilize policy debates, stimulating participants to exchange experiences and learn lessons. **I call upon all of you to join in the crusade against drugs abuse.**

I expect that this conference will result in enhancing regional cooperation among the participating States in matters of drug law enforcement and drug abuse control. It should also lead to a better assessment of the adequacy of drug abuse treatment and rehabilitation facilities in the region, and further stimulate the concerned agencies of the government for initiating appropriate action.

Historically, subcontinent India has been a traditional consumer of opium and various cannabis derivatives (bhang, marijuana/ganja and hashish). These narcotics were mostly consumed for medicinal purposes, for recreation or during religious and social ceremonies. Earlier, almost all the demands for these drugs were met locally. Only a small quantity of hashish was smuggled in from Nepal and Pakistan. However, in the early 1980s, in the wake of inflow of heroin, which has widespread with disastrous consequences, drug trafficking became an issue of concern.

In subsequent years, the large scale availability of synthetic and medicinal drugs and their abuse have added new dimensions to the concerns about drug trafficking.

Drug abuse is a complex phenomenon, which has various social, cultural, biological, geographical, historical, economic and psychological aspects. The disintegration of the old joint family system, absence of parental love and care in modern families, where both parents are working, decline of old religious and moral values etc lead to a rise in the number of drug addicts, who take drugs to escape hard realities of life.

It has led to increase in the crime rate. You are aware that drugs remove inhibition and impair judgment, egging one on to commit offences. Incidence of eve-teasing, group clashes, assault and impulsive murders increase with drug abuse. Apart from affecting the financial stability, addiction increases conflicts and causes untold emotional pain for every member of the family. With most drug users being in the productive age group of 18-35 years, **the loss in terms of human potential is incalculable.**

The nexus between drug traffickers, organized criminal networks and terrorists has created a force powerful enough to cause instability in the country. Money generated through drug trade has also been used to fund various insurgent and terrorist movements. **The National Survey of 2004 points to the problem of India's population having twice the global (and Asian) average prevalence of illicit consumption, but also shows that the treatment resources available are not commensurate with the 'burden of work' (number of dependent drug users) requiring immediate treatment.**

India is wedged between the world's two largest areas of illicit opium production, the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle. This proximity has traditionally been viewed as a source of vulnerability, since it has made India both a destination and a transit route for opiates produced in these regions. The INCB report ranks Myanmar as second to Afghanistan in opium production, but this position could well change soon or may have already changed. In that North East India sits on the western corner of Myanmar's infamous Golden Triangle.

The North East region is known as a place with rampant use of drugs, high number of HIV and AIDS, regular ethnic conflict, poverty and unemployment. Politically and socially also, it has been a neglected region. Easy access and availability of illegal drugs and close proximity with places like Laos, Thailand and Myanmar have also contributed to it. Heroin and Spasmo, a painkiller drug, are commonly used by the addicts of this region. Strict laws against heroin trafficking in Mizoram in 1990s and in Manipur in 2000s resulted in shift to another form i.e. vein puncturing habit of injecting pharmaceutical products like dextropropoxyphene, which is a pain reliever. Cannabis (ganja) is widely used in places like Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura.

The North Eastern region of India borders Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal. The total length of International border of this region measures 5437.15 kilometers. Drugs trafficking, being a trans-border criminal activity, gives new dimensions to the problem. Hence, such disturbing phenomenon in frontier states will create dangerous situation in terms of national security as well.

Coming to Arunachal, although a number of districts in the State are affected, in 2010, at the behest of Government of Arunachal Pradesh, INSA conducted an in-depth study in two of the worst affected districts of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh, namely Anjaw and Lohit. In its survey report INSA drew our attention to a number of **disturbing facts, including the trends in illicit cultivation, trafficking and irresponsible use of opium by young rural population.** Simultaneously, the report highlighted the fact of **grossly inadequate facilities for treatment and rehabilitation.** I have gone through the report and find it very insightful and it is receiving my utmost attention.

Having talked about **magnitude of the problem and its 'why'**, let me flag a few suggestions, which the esteemed participants of the conference may debate. I believe, first thing is to **acknowledge the fact that, there is a problem of illicit drugs in the north east. Once we accept the problem and its gravity, looking for solutions is easier.**

First, talking about opium, it is observed that the Central Bureau of Narcotics (CBN) conducts destruction operations in the opium cultivating districts, when the opium is about to be harvested. Such destruction, during the time of harvesting creates resentment amongst local populace and there have been instances of resistance, sometimes violent against these attempts of the CBN. **While this Destruction Agency of the Government is very active in the region, the preventive wing of the Narcotics is almost defunct.** If the awareness campaign is conducted when the farmers are sowing these poppy seeds in the month of September and October, the local population cultivating these crops may decide not to cultivate opium. Therefore **I would like to recommend that activities of the concerned agencies should be synchronized, understanding the life cycle, geo-climatic, socioeconomic realities of the region.**

Secondly, the **preventive aspect of opium life cycle** is not complete, unless the opium cultivating farmers, who are willing to abandon this practice of opium cultivation, are provided with some alternative cash crops like large cardamom cultivation, Horticulture crops etc. There are few villages in Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, where the farmers have abandoned the practice of opium cultivation and successfully cultivating large cardamom in lieu of opium cultivation. Such initiatives need to be encouraged to be sustained.

Thirdly, regular and intensive **awareness campaign** in all the sensitive parts of the region should be undertaken pro-actively with active participation and contribution of civil society, NGOs, grass root and political leaders.

Fourthly, as Noble laureate and Bharat Ratna Nelson Mandela said, I quote **'Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world'**. We have to strengthen our education system further and create awareness about drug abuses. **Drug education should be included as a core component of the health curriculum in schools.** Setting up of support groups for parents to teach them how best to educate their children about the ill effects of substance abuse will ensure that younger generations are free from this menace.

Fifthly, there are many different tribes, faiths and communities in the whole of north east region. Arunachal Pradesh, for example is a home to 26 major tribes and 110 sub-tribes and minor tribes. If we **take up this subject at community level**, talk to the local community leaders, women in particular, different faith leaders, and churches about funding for youth clubs, art facilities and other activities to give local youth meaningful outlets, in place of spending time on the streets drinking and taking drugs, it can bring a positive change.

Sixthly, while the preventive action is undertaken by CBN and Police, as already mentioned, the **rehabilitation and counseling services are a major lacuna in NE region.** Therefore, there is strong case for establishment of rehabilitation-cum-counseling sessions for drug addiction to be established in NE region. We need to strengthen and improve our counseling services and treatment programs for those with substance abuse problems in our community. **It is a priority area and Central & State Governments will do well to focus on it, allot adequate funds for such facilities and also effectively monitor running of such centers and programmes.**

In the ultimate analysis, I believe, the problem of illicit drugs in Northeast is a joint responsibility of Narcotic Control Bureau, Ministries and departments of Rural Development, Agriculture, Social Justice & Welfare and Health. **A single agency with representatives of these agencies should device a comprehensive policy for dealing with this problem of opium/illicit drugs in Northeast region.**

Above all, the Civil society as a whole has to rise collectively to take on this challenge.

As I conclude, on my own behalf also on behalf of people of North East, I convey good wishes for the successful conduct of this three-day conference on illicit drugs in the North East. I am confident that this initiative of INSA will be fruitful and we will have practical solutions to the challenges due to drugs menace. Also, **I would like INSA to follow up on its Report of 2010 and conduct awareness programmes and assist my State Government to draw out doable action plan. My Government will be in touch with you soon. I also look forward to this type of conference in different parts of North eastern region in the future.**

To those addicted to drugs, my message is:-

Addiction is a monster, it lives inside and feeds off you, takes from you, controls you and destroys you. Its a beast that tears you apart, rips out your soul, and laughs at your weakness. Its a stone wall that stands to keep you in and the rest out. Its a shadow that always lurks behind you, waiting to strike.

Finally, I would like to conclude my address with a poem by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, which is very close to my heart:

*Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever-widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom,
my Father, let my country awake*

Once again I congratulate INSA, led by its President Shri Romesh Bhattacharji and Secretary Shri Devendra Dutt for a grand initiative. I wish the conference all the success.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.