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Drug Syndicate used Telegram, crypto-currency payments and anonymous drop shippers

Posted On: 02 JUL 2025 5:34PM by PIB Delhi

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Shri Amit Shah has congratulated NCB and all agencies on busting a global drug cartel. Shri Amit Shah said that Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi-led Government is determined to saw off every drug cartel and protect our youth, no matter where they operate from.

In a post on X platform, Union Home Minister Shri Amit Shah said that “Congratulations to NCB and all agencies on busting a global drug cartel. The probe set a stellar example of multi-agency coordination, resulting in 8 arrests and seizures of 5 consignments while triggering crackdowns in the US and Australia against the ring that operates across 4 continents and 10+ nations. Our agencies are constantly monitoring the sophisticated modes like crypto payments and anonymous drop shippers used by these gangs. PM Shri Narendra Modi Ji-led govt is determined to saw off every drug cartel and protect our youth, no matter where they operate from.”

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— Amit Shah (@AmitShah) July 2, 2025

In one of the most far-reaching crackdowns against the illegal pharmaceutical drug trade, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), HQ Operations Unit, has successfully dismantled a transnational drug trafficking syndicate that used encrypted digital platforms, drop shipping models, and cryptocurrency to smuggle controlled medicines across four continents. What began with a routine vehicle interception near Bengali Market in New Delhi unravelled into a sophisticated criminal web operating across India, USA, Australia, and Europe — showcasing the global reach of illicit pharma networks and NCB's capability to lead coordinated international enforcement actions. This operation uncovered a global network spanning 04 continents and more than 10 countries.

The Investigation Trail: From Delhi to Alabama

On 25th May 2025, acting on secret intelligence, the NCB HQ Ops team intercepted a car near Mandi House in Delhi. From the possession of its two occupants—both B. Pharma graduates from a reputed private university in Noida—3.7 kilograms of Tramadol tablets were seized.

The arrested individuals confessed to operating a vendor profile on a major Indian B2B platform, from where they sold pharmaceutical pills to clients across USA, Europe, and Australia. Leads from the interrogation led to a stockist in Roorkee, followed by the arrest of a key associate in Mayur Vihar, Delhi, who revealed connections with a contact in Udupi (Karnataka) responsible for organizing bulk orders for shipments to the USA.

From Udupi, NCB uncovered data on 50 international consignments, including:

- 29 packages from USA to USA
- 18 from Australia to Australia
- 1 each to Estonia, Spain and Switzerland

The above information was shared with global counterparts and Interpol, leading to the identification and arrest of a bulk re-shipper and money launderer in Alabama, USA by the US DEA, along with a massive haul of controlled medicines.

A Network Built for Secrecy

The syndicate operated on encrypted communication platforms like Telegram, relied on cryptocurrency payments, PayPal, Western Union and used anonymous international drop shippers to evade detection. Further digital forensics led to arrests of two more Indian nationals from New Delhi and Jaipur, who handled logistics and supply-side operations. The operators never shipped in their home countries and coordinated through Other Drop-shippers in network to avoid legal consequences.

The kingpin, who coordinated international linkages and finances, has been identified and located in the UAE. NCB is actively working in collaboration with UAE authorities.

Linked Illegal Factory in Australia

Investigations further revealed the existence of a clandestine pill manufacturing facility in Australia, directly tied to the syndicate. Law enforcement in Australia has successfully dismantled this unit. Operations in other jurisdictions are still ongoing.

Action in America

In a significant development stemming from intelligence shared by India's Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (US DEA) has apprehended a key player in an international drug trafficking network. Joel Hall, a major re-shipper based in Alabama, was arrested following a coordinated operation, leading to the seizure of over 17,000 tablets of controlled medication.

During the crackdown, authorities also uncovered multiple cryptocurrency wallets and active parcels linked to the syndicate, indicating a sophisticated and tech-enabled trafficking operation. Investigative and enforcement actions concerning these digital assets and parcels are actively ongoing.

Adding to the breakthrough, an Indian-American individual identified as a key money launderer in the network is now facing indictment in the United States, marking a critical step in dismantling the financial backbone of this illegal enterprise.

In parallel, the US DEA has successfully intercepted five parcels, resulting in the recovery of approximately 700 grams of Zolpidem tablets, a commonly misused sedative.

The Modus Operandi: Sophisticated Global Network Uncovered

Investigations have revealed that the mastermind of this international drug trafficking network was operating out of the UAE, orchestrating both the orders and supply modules with a high level of coordination and compartmentalization.

The orders module functioned through a major B2B platform, where the handlers subscribed to premium vendor categories to enhance visibility and attract potential buyers. To manage incoming sales leads, the group ran a fully functional call center based in Udupi, employing around 10 staff members—many of whom were reportedly unaware of the illicit nature of the operation.

Once orders were confirmed, advance payments were collected in cryptocurrency, which were then routed to the supply module operators after deducting a 10–15% commission. The supply module, in turn, retained a further 10% before disbursing payments to re-shippers located in designated countries, who handled the final delivery of the controlled substances.

In a calculated move to expand operations, repeat buyers were groomed and recruited as re-shippers or stockists, helping the network grow organically across borders. Multiple such stockists have already been identified by our international counterparts, and actions against them are actively underway.

This intricate network showcases the growing convergence of digital platforms, cryptocurrency, and transnational logistics in modern illicit trade—and highlights the importance of global cooperation and intelligence-sharing in combating such operations.

Ongoing Financial and Cyber Probes

With 08 arrests so far, the financial trail involving crypto wallets and hawala channels is under investigation. NCB is also engaging with private sector platforms to counter the proliferation of illegal online pharmacies that openly advertise the sale of controlled medicines.

RK / VV / RR / PS

(Release ID: 2141583)

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