Rationality in the campaign against Drugs

What is the issue?

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- Punjab’s drug menace is extremely severe.
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- It demands comprehensive actions sans empty gestures and gimmicks.
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What is the extent of drug menace in Punjab?

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- The challenges faced by the State are huge and in 2017 alone, the government arrested 18,977 peddlers and treated some 2 lakh addicts.
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- By some accounts as many as two-thirds of all households in Punjab have a drug addict in their midst.
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- Punjab’s prisons are overcrowded with drug-users and peddlers, and its streets and farms witness the easy availability of narcotics and opiates.
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- The sheer extent of the problem suggests it is more than just a few profiteers that have been responsible for causing this menace or helping to sustain it.
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- The scale of the menace indicates the existence of well-oiled machinery that has the secret support and collaboration of at least a few government officials.
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How has the political response been?

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- The Punjab government has been piloting a strong crackdown on the drug menace that has become widely prevalent in the state. \
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- In this regard, recently an order was passed for conducting mandatory drug tests on all the 3.5 lakh government employees (including the police).
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- But this is expected to be little more than mere eye-catchy tokenism as the main demography trapped in drugs are unemployed youth.
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- Also, Punjab cabinet's recommendation to recommend death for drug-peddlers is mere sensationalism rather than a concrete step.
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- Notably, capital punishment hasn't proved an effective deterrent in previous instances and is anyway abhorrent.
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What are the larger implications?

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- The "Golden Crescent Region" to the North-West of India (Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan), is the major production destination for "Opium and Heroin".
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- Drugs produced in this region, percolates into India through the border across Punjab and from here it tends to spread to elsewhere in the country.
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- The existence of this route indicates that those guarding Punjab's 553-km border with Pakistan must take serious steps to plug the inflow.
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- Given the connection of drug trade with terror financing in the region, it is also critical in the national security point of view.
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- Border Security is beyond the Punjab government, and hence central policy coordinators need to strategise to control these narcotic inflows.
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What is the way ahead?

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- A comprehensive war on drugs on several fronts is required.
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- This would include interventions in the community to spread awareness and foster a culture against the use of drugs.
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- The politicians have a very crucial role to play in resolving the crisis, and they need to think beyond party lines to achieve this.
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- Resorting to sensationalism to score political brownie points might only complicate the situation by dissuading real brainstorming.
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Source: The Hindu

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