U.S. Crackdown on Fentanyl

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance

Why in news?

The United States revoked and denied visas to certain business executives and corporate leadership from India for their involvement in trafficking fentanyl precursor chemicals.

- **Fentanyl –** Fentanyl is a chemical that ***does not occur in nature***.
- Fentanyl and its analogues therefore need to be synthesized through raw chemicals known as precursors.
- It is a highly potent ***synthetic piperidine opioid*** primarily used as an ***analgesic (pain relief) and anesthetic***.

  Opioids *are a class of drugs that "derive from, or mimic, natural substances found in the opium poppy plant". Some common opioids include oxycodone, morphine, codeine, heroin, and fentanyl.*

- It is ***30 to 50 times more potent than heroin*** and 100 times more potent than morphine.
- It was first synthesized by ***Paul Janssen in 1959***.
- Fentanyl is contributing to an ***epidemic of synthetic opioid drug overdose deaths*** in the ***United States***.

  At least 105,263 Americans died of drug overdoses, the majority of which involved synthetic opioids such as ***fentanyl and fentanyl analogues*** *during 2022-2023.*

- **Effects of fentanyl -** Similar to other opioid analgesics, fentanyl causes effects such as relaxation, pain relief, sedation, confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, and respiratory depression.
- Overdose can cause stupor, changes in pupil size, clammy skin, coma, and

respiratory failure leading to death.

- **Fentanyl in India -**
  - Fentanyl poses a ***growing threat in India***, where it is used in both legal pain management and illegal drug trafficking.
  - The country is also *increasingly a manufacturing hub for illicit fentanyl and its precursors*, with a significant portion of this production destined for markets abroad, including the United States.
  - Under the ***Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (1985),*** fentanyl is classified as an ***Essential Narcotic Drug (END)*** and is legally used for medical purposes.

Quick Facts

International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)
• It is an ***independent, quasi-judicial body*** responsible for monitoring the implementation of ***United Nations international drug control conventions***. • **Established in -** 1968. • INCB works to ***prevent drug diversion from licit to illicit channels*** and to ensure an adequate supply of controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. • It is composed of 13 independent members elected by the ***UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)*** for five-year terms. • The INCB's mandate is defined by ***3 main UN drug control conventions***: - Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, - Convention on Psychotropic Substances of 1971, and - United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of 1988.

References

1. The New Indian Express | Fentanyl precursor trafficking
2. Department of Justice, USA | Role of Fentanyl Precursors
3. INCB | International Narcotics Control Board

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