

Odisha second in country to destroy cannabis cultivation

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BHUBANESWAR: The state police destroyed illegal cannabis cultivation on nearly 3600 acres in different districts last fiscal, becoming second in the country after Himachal Pradesh that recorded destruction of hemp plants on nearly 10,000 acres during the same period.

"We have been informed by the [narcotics control bureau](#) (NCB) that our state stood second. States like Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal and Manipur witness large-scale illegal cannabis plantation. For 2017-18, we have set a target to destroy hemp cultivation on over 4,000 acres," additional director general (Crime Branch) Santosh Upadhaya told TOI. Crime Branch is the nodal agency in the state to supervise crackdown by police and excise officials on narcotic-related offenders.

Out of the 30 districts in [Odisha](#), eight Maoist-hit districts—Angul, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Malkangiri and Boudh—are the worst affected pockets where illegal cannabis cultivation is rampant. Police said Left-Wing Extremists (LEW) has been encouraging such illegal activities in the forested areas of the state. "Ganja cultivation is the biggest source of income for Maoists. Money generated from the hemp cultivation is being used in violent activities by Maoists. Our focus is to destroy the illegal hemp cultivations," said a police officer.

On Wednesday, director general of police [Rajendra Prasad](#) Sharma discussed with senior officials of Crime Branch, excise and narcotics control bureau and asked them to strengthen their intelligence networks. "Our prime focus is on coordinated strategies between all concerned enforcement agencies. With the help of satellite imagery, we have been tracking hemp cultivations. Due to regular crackdowns, the hemp cultivation has been checked to a great extent," Upadhaya said.

The Crime Branch chief said police in other districts have been alerted to keep close watch on ganja cultivators, who might shift to new areas in view of constant crackdowns on them in the worst-affected regions. In 2015, Crime Branch had observed that the ganja cultivators shifted their bases to Nayagarh and [Cuttack](#) districts. Police said the situation is now under control in Nayagarh and Cuttack.

Recently the state government decided to invoke Section 46 of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act against those land owners who allow cultivation of cannabis and poppy and fail to inform police, excise or forest authorities regarding such cultivation. Police said it is difficult to arrest all those involved in the cultivation as the plantation is usually carried out in hilly terrains. Last fiscal, only 37 persons were arrested as against 116 in 2015-16. "Even though we have been destroying the illegal cultivation regularly, this is difficult to completely wipe out the activity as cannabis is being grown in dense hilly and inaccessible areas, where we face difficulties," another police officer said.

2014-15: 1,18,86,219 hemp plants on 3929 acres destroyed

2015-16: 39,18,966 hemp plants on 2456 acres destroyed

2016-17: 28,48,103 hemp plants on 3600 acres destroyed

2014-15: 132 cases registered, 97 persons arrested

2015-16: 103 cases registered, 116 persons arrested

2016-17: 88 cases registered, 37 persons arrested