

## Drugs smuggled out of country via postal route, say DRI officials

Seizure of the chemical has sent alarm bells ringing in the security agencies as it is ten times as potent as heroin and is used as a party drug in a number of countries as per a DRI official.

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[Punya Priya Mitra](#)  
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The factory at Polo Ground, Indore where the drug was being manufactured. It has been sealed by Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) officials. (HT Photo)

In a major revelation, the two Indians and one Mexican national who were allegedly caught by Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) with 10.91 kg of fentanyl hydrochloride, worth around Rs 100 crores, have confessed during interrogation that they had smuggled the chemical out of the country four times in the past six to seven months through a postal route, adding a new dimension to the international smuggling racket.

DRI deputy director Nitin Agrawal said, "Mohammad Sadiq (59) and Manu Gupta (45) have said that they had smuggled the chemical through postal department to their contact, Jorge Solis (43), who has also been arrested. But this time Jorge came in person to take the delivery."

Agrawal said they were still in the process of probing the linkages of those arrested, but what they found out so far during investigation that the accused were sending the chemical only to Mexico. They (DRI officials) are also exploring a terror angle but so far nothing has come up. The drug was said to be very lethal and could lead to death with slightest of overdose.

Agrawal said Sadiq, who is a resident of Indore, is a PhD in material synthesis from Devi Ahilya Vishwa Vidyalaya (DAVV), Indore and it was due to his extraordinary skill that he was able to manufacture it in his small one room set up at Polo Ground, Indore.

"It is not an easy drug to manufacture. In other places outside the country they use precursor chemicals, but here Sadiq was manufacturing the precursor chemicals and also the final chemical, making detection all the more difficult," Agrawal said.

The seizure of the chemical has sent alarm bells ringing in the security agencies because the substances are, "Ten times as potent as heroin and is used as a party drug in a large number of countries," a DRI official said wishing not be quoted as he was not authorised to speak to media.

According to directorate sources, the DRI got a tip-off from Mexico that Manu Gupta, who is also a resident of Indore, was involved in smuggling of the drug. The DRI kept tabs on Gupta for around a week and found him coming to the factory in Polo Ground. After making discreet enquiries, they found out that the premises they used, situated on the first floor of a two-storey structure, was rented out to them by owner of a pharmaceutical firm, who runs his pharmacy company at the ground floor.

Sources said Sadiq and Gupta used to start work after 7 pm, when the work at Arya Pharmaceuticals ended, and worked till the morning.

A visit to the neighbourhood where the drug was being manufactured showed that though Sadiq and Gupta had been working there for the past six months, no one knew them. Owner of Jahawar Ice Factory and Cold Storage Deepak Kalwani said that they were stunned by the revelations.

“We did see some four wheelers coming up to the gates, but there was hardly anything to be suspicious about,” Kalwani said.

Police sources said interrogating Jorge was a bit tough. “He speaks only Spanish and some broken English, and our knowledge of Spanish is nil, so we are having a tough time getting information from him,” sources said.

The DRI is trying to find out the source of the raw material used to manufacture fentanyl hydrochloride. They have also seized mobile phones of the accused to find out their national and international contacts.

Legally, fentanyl hydrochloride is the salt form of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid with pain-relieving and anaesthetic properties. It is also made illegally and used as a recreational drug, often mixed with heroin or cocaine. It is a potent narcotic analgesic, abuse of which leads to habituation or addiction. It is classified as a drug under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, said officials.