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At the crossroads: The collective fight against drug abuse

Today is the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. It's important to strengthen the fight against this threat as the recent surge in cases in Goa makes this effort more urgent than ever



Elsa Angel Rose

Today, as the world observes International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, Goa finds itself at critical crossroads. Amid monsoon celebrations, there is an urgent need to pause and reflect on a threat that is growing at a rapid rate. In just the first four months of 2025, drugs worth Rs 68 crore have been seized from this coastal state, highlighting a surge in drug abuse. This alarming rise is deeply concerning for parents, teachers, and primary caregivers, who stand at the frontlines, striving to protect children from falling into the trap of addiction.

WHY TEENS TURN TO DRUGS AND WHAT'S AT STAKE

Children, especially teenagers, often grapple with emotional pain, peer pressure, academic stress, family tensions, and more. In these vulnerable moments, drugs can feel like a quick escape, a way to numb deep emotional wounds and painful memories. For some, it's a way to silence the sting of loneliness, boredom, or rejection.

Dr Akshada Amonkar, a psychiatrist, said, "Drug abuse in teenagers can lead to severe mental health issues such as: depression and anxiety, mood swings and emotional instability, impaired brain development, affecting memory, decision-making, and impulse control, higher rates of self-harm and suicidal thoughts, and more." The doctor stated that it is pertinent that this issue is taken seriously. She said, "If we can halt drug use in teenagers, then we will have fewer of them going into adult drug abuse, which is then very difficult to handle."

PARENTING IN PERILOUS TIMES

"A child having a good friend circle, having meaningful and thought-provoking discussions about grave issues happening in society, is very important. The more we discuss, the more the child becomes aware," said Cecille Rodrigues, a social activist and a mother. According to her, if parents keep mindlessly restricting kids from everything, they will become

more curious to try it out. Cecille said, "Let them have all the freedom, but guide them so they know what is right and wrong." With the rising cases of illicit drug peddling and drug abuse in Goa, parents are the most worried and concerned segment of the population. They are all keeping a close watch on who their kids are spending time with, what they are watching, what they are reading, who they are interacting with, and more. Even though worried, parents are confronting challenges head-on with determination.



Tallulah D'Silva, a parent, said, "As their guardians, we must be aware of our kids' friend circles, and we must spend quality time with our children to share and establish trust." Dr Priya de Sousa, another parent, said, "Sometimes I show them videos and stories of people whose lives have been destroyed because of drugs. I try to be a friend to them and not a strict parent when it comes to such discussions. So they can speak to me freely about anything."

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EDUCATION IN PREVENTING DRUG ABUSE

Although parents, schools, and responsible authorities try their best through policies and initiatives to fight drug abuse, there are still a huge number of loopholes which are yet to be addressed. One teacher, who requested anonymity, said, "During school hours, students appear clean of substances, but what happens after school hours is unfortunately very difficult for institutional authorities to control."

As per ToFEI (Tobacco Free Educational Institution) guidelines, there is a ban on selling tobacco products within 100 meters of the school. However, there are many breaches of these guidelines. Teachers do not have much idea about which shops students manage to buy cigarettes and other addictive substances. Hence, even if such guidelines are in place, the extent to which they are followed is a concern.



Parents are the only people who can monitor what kids are engaging in after their school hours. Addressing the issue of drug abuse must be a dynamic, ongoing process, not a reaction triggered only by a rise in cases. It should consistently ensure that every child is informed, aware, and prepared to make the right choices. Sudan Naik Gaonkar, a teacher, shared, "Student clubs are formed by the Education Department and the Goa State Commission for Protection of Child Rights. Competitions like drawing and slogan writing are organised to create awareness. Education

KNOW ABOUT TOFEI

The ToFEI (Tobacco Free Educational Institution) guidelines aim to create a tobacco-free environment within and around educational institutions, protecting students and staff from the harmful effects of tobacco. These guidelines speak about the need for tobacco control, the health effects of tobacco use, and activities for tobacco-free educational institutions. By implementing these guidelines, educational institutions can contribute to a healthier environment and help protect the well-being of their students and community.

through curriculum by integrating areas on drugs, alcohol, tobacco, is a few initiatives organized in schools."

Liza Tavares, another teacher, shared, "Schools and colleges have appointed trained counsellors for assistance to children." According to her, teachers use classroom discussions during value education periods to put across real-life case studies and storytelling to raise awareness."



HERE ARE SOME FAST FACTS!

- 1) 68 crore worth of drugs seized in Goa between January and April 2025
- 2) BIGGEST LOCAL DRUG BUST: Rs11.6 crore hydroponic weed seized in March 2025
- 3) Rs 43 crore cocaine seizure in April 2025 highlights Goa's trafficking links
- 4) Over 1.5 crore Indian children (ages 10-17) are reported to be addicted to substances, including alcohol and tobacco.

SWIPE RIGHT

AR Rahman and Pharrell Williams work on 'Yaara Punjabi'



Renowned Indian composer and singer AR Rahman recently met American musician and songwriter Pharrell Williams at Paris Fashion Week. Rahman shared a photo on social media featuring himself, Pharrell, and his son AR Ameen. He also posted a video from the event on Instagram, captioning it, "It was fun working with Pharrell Williams on the track 'Yaara' for Louis Vuitton." The video included a glimpse of South Korean singer J-Hope from BTS. Rahman and Pharrell collaborated on 'Yaara Punjabi', a fusion track that debuted during the Louis Vuitton Men's Spring-Summer 2026 runway show. The piece, produced by the duo with orchestral arrangements by Thomas Rousset, combined traditional Punjabi rhythms with contemporary Parisian style. Architect Bijoy Jain designed a set inspired by the ancient Indian game Snakes and Ladders, complemented by India-inspired bejewelled trunks.

Kareena Kapoor posts heartfelt message on Karisma's birthday

Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor turned 51 and her younger sister Kareena wrote an emotional note for Karisma on Instagram, praising her sister for being the "strongest girl" in tough times. The actor shared her most favourite photograph of her husband Saif Ali Khan and Karisma on Instagram, "This is my most favourite picture of you both. To the strongest and the bestest girl in the universe... It's been a tough year for us... but you know what... as they say tough times don't last... the toughest sisters do... To my Sister, my mother, my best friend... Happy birthday My Lolo @therealkarismakapoor," Kareena Kapoor wrote in the post. Karisma's birthday came two weeks after the death of her ex-husband Sunjay Kapur on June 12.



Priyanka Chopra turned heads in a daring, silver gown at the 'Heads of State' premiere in NYC. The actress stunned alongside co-stars Idris Elba and John Cena at Lincoln Center.

GOA'S NADIA ASLAM BAGS ASIA CAKE OSCAR 2025

Goan cake artist and baking educator, Nadia Aslam brought international honour home, winning the prestigious Cake Artist of the Year title at the Asia Cake Oscars 2025 in Sri Lanka



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If you believe that you eat with your eyes first, then Nadia Aslam's cakes will be a triple threat appealing to the senses of vision, taste and smell. Nadia was recently crowned Cake Artist of the Year at the Asia Cake Oscars 2025, held at Colombo, Sri Lanka. The award ceremony, hosted by the Sri Lanka Institute of Confectionery and Culinary Arts (SLICCA) under the guidance of its founder Dr Fathima Rushda, brought together the crème de la crème of Asia's confectionery and cake design talent. Nadia stood out not only for her creativity and skill but also as the only Goan among the 19 Indian delegates. With participants from countries such as Iran, Maldives, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka, the event was a melting pot of cultures and cake artistry.

From Taleigao to the world: Taleigao-based Nadia's journey began from graduating from Goa College of Home Science. She majored in textiles and she first discovered her love for baking during food practicals in college. Encouraged by her mother, Hasina Bandukara, well-known beautician and aromatherapist in Goa, Nadia pursued her hobby further, eventually enrolling in specialised baking classes to hone her craft.

Initially, she baked only for friends and family. "It started as something casual," she recalls, "but the appreciation kept coming, and my mother and friends urged me to take it more seriously." Today, the mother of three, Nouman (19), Mohd. Ali (16), and Ridaa (13), Nadia runs a successful cake studio in Goa, known for its exceptional flavour combinations, attention to detail, and artistic presentation.

Looking ahead: Winning the Asia Cake Oscar is not just a personal milestone for Nadia Aslam, but a recognition of Goa's emerging place on the international culinary map. She says, "It's an honour to represent my state and

my country. But more than the award, it's about inspiring others to believe in their passions." "Cake crafting is really about crafting smiles and that's the sweetest reward of all," concludes Nadia.



The hard work behind the edible art

But it's not just about the final product. Nadia emphasises the meticulous process that goes into creating these edible works of art. "For instance, if I know a cake is due on June 27, there's very little I can do far in advance because everything involved is edible. At most, I can gather supplies and cake craft items ahead of time. But the actual work begins only around June 25. Even then, that time is mostly used for prepping dummy elements. The real cakes are usually ready by the evening of the 26th, and only then can the final steps begin—stacking, attaching flowers, fixing borders, and other finishing touches," she explains.

She further adds, "All of this has to be done on the last day. During this period, the AC runs non-stop from the 25th to the 27th to keep everything in perfect condition. And after all that, comes the ultimate challenge: transporting the cake to the venue. If the cake is too large, it must be stacked on-site, which is another hurdle altogether especially when the temperature drops and the fondant starts to turn sticky." "But despite all the stress and sleepless nights, the most rewarding moment is seeing the expressions of joy, the wide smiles, and the sparkle in people's eyes. The positive feedback from everyone in the hall makes it all worth it," she says.

Challenging the Status Quo

Despite her success, Nadia believes cake artistry still struggles for recognition as a serious profession. "When someone hears that a person is taking cake orders, it's often not given much importance. I feel that cake designing is still waiting to be recognized as a serious profession, on par with fields like fashion or dress designing. In fact, cake designing can be even more taxing and stressful," says Nadia.

Her work has not only earned her accolades but also inspired others in Goa and beyond to consider baking and confectionery as viable careers.

