

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

## ● TECHNOLOGY

## ● ECOLOGY

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## TELECOM ACT WILL HOLD GOOD FOR MANY YEARS

**CONTEXT:** The Indian Parliament recently approved the Telecommunications Act of 2023, moving away from old license systems to a more thoughtful authorization approach. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw pointed out important changes like managing the spectrum better, improving right-of-way processes, and aiming to increase digital connectivity threefold. He stressed that these changes aim to encourage innovation, enhance security, and tackle global issues in the digital world.

**BACKGROUND:** India's telecom landscape, bogged down by outdated laws and fragmentation, embarked on a modernization journey with the Telecommunications Act 2023. This Act replaces archaic regulations with streamlined authorization, flexible spectrum management, and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Driven by Digital India's vision and extensive consultations, it aims to unleash innovation, attract investment, and bridge the digital divide. Success hinges on smooth implementation, balancing security with privacy, and evolving with technology. This Act paves the way for a connected, empowered, and globally competitive India.

### KEY PROVISIONS OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT, 2023:

#### Transition from License Permit Regime:

The Act signifies a paradigm shift from a license permit regime to a more calculated authorization for an extended period. Telecom spectrum auctions, guided by a Supreme Court judgment, will be the norm, with exceptions made for sectors like defense, where spectrum allocation will be administered.

#### Spectrum Management and Innovation:

The Act introduces provisions for sharing and relinquishing unused spectrum, ensuring the harmonization of different spectrum bands. To foster innovation, a 'sandbox' is established, allowing academia to experiment with emerging technologies.

#### Right of Way Reforms:

Recognizing the role of states in governing telecom infrastructure, the Act empowers district judges to decide compensation in cases of disputes related to the Right of Way.

#### Digital Connectivity and Dispute Resolution:

Acknowledging the need to triple digital connectivity, the Act implements a four-tier structure for dispute resolution and establishes mechanisms for telecom companies to self-report violations. An online dispute resolution mechanism for consumer grievances is also put in place.

#### Universal Services Obligation Fund (USOF):

The USOF is expanded into the Digital Bharat Nidhi, aiming to facilitate research and development alongside its mandate to enhance connectivity in under-served areas.

#### National Security Considerations:

Responding to criticism regarding provisions allowing government control over telecommunications networks, Minister Vaishnaw justified the necessity of such measures for national security, citing recent global conflicts where power sectors and telecommunications were targeted. The Act aligns with established interception frameworks, ensuring accountability and security.

#### Regulation of Over-the-Top (OTT) Apps:

The minister clarified that the Act currently does not provide for the regulation of OTT apps like WhatsApp. He emphasized that the government operates within defined departmental remits and suggested that hypothetical situations might prompt changes in regulatory oversight.

#### Digital Governance Challenges:

Reflecting on the evolution from newspapers to the digital era, Minister Vaishnaw highlighted concerns about the safe harbor principle, emphasizing the growing global consensus on the need for greater accountability in social media content.

#### Aadhaar Authentication and KYC:

The Act mandates biometric authentication for individuals obtaining telecom services, emphasizing the importance of Know Your Customer (KYC) practices for telecom services. Minister Vaishnaw clarified that any biometric authorization, such as fingerprints, suffices for KYC.

#### Global Outreach and Electronics Manufacturing:

India's international collaborations to spread India Stack technologies, including Aadhaar, have garnered significant interest. Minister Vaishnaw outlined strategic goals for electronics manufacturing, emphasizing its employment-generating potential and complementarity to India's design capabilities.

#### CONCLUSION:

The Telecommunications Act, 2023, represents a comprehensive and forward-looking approach to address the challenges and opportunities in India's telecommunications sector. By prioritizing innovation, accountability, and national security, the Act lays the foundation for sustained growth and competitiveness in the global telecommunications marketplace. As India continues to strengthen its digital infrastructure, these reforms are poised to have a lasting impact on the nation's connectivity, technological innovation, and economic development.

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## ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

## FLASH PMI SIGNALS REBOUND IN ECONOMIC MOMENTUM IN JAN.

**CONTEXT:** Private sector industrial and services activity rebounded this month as per a new HSBC Flash India PMI, which showed new orders rose in January at the fastest pace in six months, while overall activity levels were at a four-month high.

### Flashing green

Private sector industrial and services activity rebounded this month as per a new HSBC Flash India Purchasing Managers' Index



- The HSBC Flash India Composite PMI Output Index was at 61 compared with 58.5 in December
- Flash PMI is based on responses from about 75-85% of 800 services, industry firms that are surveyed each month
- Operating capacities remained under pressure, encouraging firms to hire additional workers

The headline HSBC Flash India Composite PMI Output Index — a new seasonally adjusted index that measures the month-on-month change in the combined output of India's manufacturing and services sectors — was at 61 in January, compared with 58.5 in December. The Flash PMI, unveiled on Wednesday, is based on responses from about 75 % to 85 % of 800 services and industry firms that are surveyed each month to arrive at the comprehensive PMI that is available in the first week of the subsequent month.

#### Pressure on capacities

Operating capacities remained under pressure, encouraging firms to hire additional workers. Another factor that underpinned job creation was a pick-up in business confidence. The inaugural flash results also highlighted an intensification of cost pressures, but selling prices were raised to a smaller extent. The inaugural Flash India PMI showed that both the manufacturing and services sector grew at a faster clip in January. Of the two, business services grew at a faster clip, in fact the fastest in four months.

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## ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

## AS LIQUIDITY DEFICIT WIDENS, RBI TO INFUSE ₹2.5-LAKH CR. LIQUIDITY VIA 15-DAY VRR

**CONTEXT:** The Reserve Bank of India will infuse liquidity amounting to ₹2.50-lakh crore via a 15-day variable rate repo (VRR) auction as the overall funds deficit in the banking system widened to ₹3.34-lakh crore as on January 23 as compared with ₹1.29-lakh crore as on January 1.

The Centre has built up huge cash balances with the RBI as the inflows from GST (Goods and Service Tax) and advance tax remain unspent, say market experts. Overall liquidity in the banking system includes VRR auctions, liquidity drawn from the marginal standing facility, surplus funds parked at the standing deposit facility, and liquidity infused by the RBI via various long-term repo operations during the COVID-19 period (2021).

#### Pressure on banks

In the current month so far, the maximum liquidity the central bank infused was ₹1.75-lakh crore via a 13-day VRR on January 12. Banks are facing liquidity pressure on the liquidity front as there were outflows last month on account of GST payments and advance tax outflows, even as the government accumulated cash balances with the RBI estimated at about ₹2-lakh crore.

Banks are also up against stiff competition from non-banking finance companies for garnering resources. Non-convertible debentures floated by NBFCs are offering relatively higher returns (up to 10%) vs bank term deposit rates of 6.50-7.25% for over a one-year tenor. Further, with equity markets in a bull phase, retail investors have been moving out of bank deposits to actively invest in mutual funds or directly in markets, especially initial public offers. The liquidity pressure could ease if the government starts spending the balances accumulated with the RBI. When RBI absorbs the dollars that foreign portfolio investors are bringing into the Indian equity market, it could result in enhancement of liquidity.

The overall tightening of liquidity conditions is attributed mainly to higher currency leakage during the festival season, government cash balances, and the RBI's market operations. Driven by these autonomous factors, system liquidity tightened significantly compared to what was envisaged in the October policy statement. The RBI will necessarily have to infuse more durable liquidity if the tight liquidity conditions persist. On a net basis, the RBI has injected liquidity averaging ₹1.8-lakh crore between during December 16 and January 14.



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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## AT WTO, INDIA TO SUPPORT 'POOR' FISHERS

**CONTEXT:** India will not agree to an "asymmetrical" agreement on reducing fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and will insist on specific carveouts to protect its resource poor fishers and preserve the space to develop its capacities at the WTO.

In India, the livelihood of 9 million people, mostly resource poor, dependent on fishing, has to be protected. New Delhi has demanded that poor fishers should be exempt from all subsidy cuts irrespective of where they fish while all fishers in developing nations should be exempt from subsidy cuts for fishing within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles.

A third demand has also been made for a 25-year exemption to developing nations from subsidy cuts for fishing in RFMO (waters beyond EEZ) that will help them to develop their fishing capacities. These demands are part of special & differential treatment for developing nations.

Trade Ministers from 164 WTO nations will be in Abu Dhabi on February 24-29 to work out a agreements in several areas, including curbing fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. A partial agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies, to curb illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, was agreed to at the previous WTO MC12 in 2021 but only about 55 nations have adopted it yet against a requirement of 110.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## THE ISSUE OF GENOCIDE AND THE WORLD COURT

**CONTEXT:** The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is currently examining a case where South Africa accuses Israel of violating the International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in its military operations in Gaza. The ICJ held a hearing on provisional measures, and the outcome is awaited, with various countries expressing support or opposition to the case.

**BACKGROUND:** Accusing Israel of Gaza genocide, South Africa takes Israel to the ICJ. Citing civilian losses and Israeli statements, South Africa invokes the "erga omnes" duty to prevent genocide. Israel denies intent, blaming Hamas. The ICJ could order a ceasefire, aid access, or limit statements. This crucial case, beyond Gaza and Israel, tests the "rules-based international order" and exposes potential colonial bias. The ICJ's ruling and global response will be defining moments.

### SOUTH AFRICA ACCUSES ISRAEL OF GAZA GENOCIDE AT THE ICJ: A COMPLEX LEGAL CLASH

**The Accusation:** South Africa argues that Israel's military operations in Gaza violate the Genocide Convention, citing civilian casualties, infrastructure destruction, and potentially genocidal statements by Israeli officials.

**Legal Basis:** South Africa invokes its "erga omnes" obligation to prevent genocide regardless of location and the lower bar for

"provisional measures" to protect rights pending a final ruling.

**Israel's Defense:** Israel denies genocidal intent, claiming the operation targets Hamas in response to their attacks and that statements are misconstrued.

**Next Stage:** The ICJ will rule on provisional measures, potentially ordering a ceasefire, humanitarian aid access, or limits on Israeli statements.

**Beyond the Law:** The case raises questions about the ICC's role, the divide between former colonial powers and others, and the legitimacy of international law itself.

### Key Points:

- The case targets Israel, with Hamas not present due to being a non-state actor.
- The split in support reflects historical colonial lines, raising bias concerns.
- The ICJ's ruling and global response will be crucial for Gaza's suffering and international law's future.
- This case transcends the Israel-Palestine conflict, testing the "rules-based international order" and exposing potential bias in global responses to accusations of genocide.

### CONCLUSION:

The ICJ's upcoming ruling on South Africa's accusation against Israel holds immense weight not just for Gaza and the ongoing conflict, but for the entire international legal order. The court's decision and subsequent global response will be a defining moment, potentially shaping the future of how accusations of genocide are addressed and how international law is upheld.

Beyond the immediate humanitarian concerns in Gaza, this case raises crucial questions about the role of the International Criminal Court, the historical bias woven into global power dynamics, and the very legitimacy of international law itself.

The ICJ's ruling will be closely watched, with the potential to set a precedent for future accountability in the face of such grave accusations. Whether it can uphold the "rules-based international order" and navigate the complex political landscape remains to be seen.



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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## INDIA'S PROBLEM — DIFFERENT DRUGS, IDENTICAL BRAND NAMES

**CONTEXT:** Recently Oncologist Dr. Vincent Rajkumar raised concerns on social media about the identical brand name 'Linamac' being used for two different drugs – one for treating multiple myeloma (a type of cancer) and the other for treating diabetes. This shared name poses a risk of confusion at pharmacies, potentially leading to serious consequences for patients.

### AN OLD PROBLEM:

The issue of identical or similar brand names for drugs with different active ingredients has long been a concern in India's medical community.

Examples include the brand name 'Medzole' used by four different companies for drugs treating various conditions.

The broader problem extends to names that are phonetically and visually similar, leading to potential confusion.

This issue is particularly worrisome in India due to the widespread use of English, a language spoken by less than 10% of Indians on drug packaging and lax regulations in pharmacies, increasing the risk of prescription errors and patient harm.

### JUDICIARY'S RECOMMENDATION

The issue of similar or identical trade names for drugs in India has been a longstanding concern, prompting calls from the Supreme Court and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare for preventive measures.

**In 2019, the Ministry of Health, prompted by a case in the Delhi High Court, introduced the Drugs and Cosmetics (Thirteenth Amendment) Rules, 2019.**

However, this framework relies on self-certification by pharmaceutical companies and lacks a comprehensive database of pharmaceutical brand names, making it ineffective in addressing the problem of confusingly similar drug names.

### NO DATA IN INDIA

India lacks data on prescription errors, and the Ministry of Health seems to dismiss the issue in the absence of such data.

Unlike the United States and Europe, where specific divisions within drug regulators assess drug names to prevent confusion and minimize prescription errors, there is a notable lack of political will within India's Drug Regulation Section to implement similar reforms.

**CONCLUSION:** The issue of identical or similar brand names for drugs in India, exemplified by the recent 'Linamac' case, is a longstanding concern. Efforts through the Drugs and Cosmetics (Thirteenth Amendment) Rules, 2019, have proven ineffective due to reliance on self-certification and the absence of a comprehensive brand name database. The lack of prescription error data and perceived disregard by the Ministry

of Health compound the problem.

Unlike the United States and Europe, India's Drug Regulation Section lacks political will for proactive reforms to assess drug names and prevent confusion. Addressing this issue requires collaborative efforts from regulatory bodies, pharmaceutical companies, and healthcare stakeholders. Key steps include establishing a comprehensive brand name database, enhancing regulations with stricter evaluations, and fostering cooperation. Proactive measures are essential to safeguard the integrity of India's pharmaceutical market and ensure citizen well-being.

## INTERNAL SECURITY

## DANGEROUS STATUS QUO

**CONTEXT:** Hostilities still continue eight months after ethnic violence broke out between the largely valley-dwelling Meitei and the hill-dwelling Kuki-Zo communities in Manipur.

The State Government, led by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh, is perceived as biased and unable to restore peace or establish control in Kuki-Zo areas. Media and civil society are also divided along ethnic lines, further deepening the divide. Security forces are viewed through a polarized lens, increasing the risk of further violence.

### Government failure:

The Union government's response has been inadequate, relying on temporary measures and avoiding accountability. Confidence-building measures promised by officials haven't materialized, leaving communities distrustful and frustrated. The presence and activities of militant groups on both sides pose a significant danger due to their access to weapons and ability to escalate tensions. Chief Minister Singh's attempt to blame the conflict on refugees creates further animosity and risks jeopardizing the Free Movement Regime, which offers essential benefits.

### Urgent solutions:

Militias such as the Meitei radical Arambai Tenggol have been allowed to act as "defence squads" in the valley even as Kuki insurgents do the same in the hill areas. The demilitarization of non-state groups is crucial, requiring effective arms recovery and addressing the root causes of their militancy. The Union government must actively engage in conflict resolution, promoting dialogue and fostering trust between communities. Holding violators of law and order accountable, regardless of their affiliation, is essential to restore justice and deter future violence. Protecting and supporting displaced people, ensuring their safe return and access to essential services, is a key humanitarian concern. This situation requires immediate and sustained action from all levels of government, civil society, and community leaders to break the cycle of violence, address the underlying causes of ethnic tensions, and rebuild peace and stability in Manipur.

*"Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. — Martin Luther King Jr.*



## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## PROVIDING CLEAN WATER TO ALL

**CONTEXT:** Jal Jeevan Mission launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019 has already provided tap water to 73 % of rural households. More than 14 crore rural households have tap connections compared to only 3.23 crore in August 2019. Guided by the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas aur Sabka Prayas', India is rapidly advancing towards the realisation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 6 (clean water and sanitation for all).

Jal Jeevan Mission focus upon providing piped water in adequate quantities and of prescribed quality on a regular and long-term basis to every rural household in India. At the national level, we focused on strengthening infrastructure, which was a big challenge because of the diverse terrains and geographical differences in India, integrating communities, development partners, and NGOs.

### Benefits of the scheme

The Jal Jeevan Mission dealt with different kinds of challenges. Insulated pipes were used in hilly and cold regions. In villages with water quality issues, multi-village schemes through bulk water transfer were planned. Community water purification plants were provided to meet drinking and cooking water needs for the short term.

Nobel Laureate Dr. Michael Kremer's study states that providing safe water can reduce infant deaths by almost 30 %, with the potential to prevent 25 % of under-five deaths in India (1,36,000 child deaths annually). A study conducted in the financial year 2023-24 by the World Health Organization states that 4 lakh diarrhoeal deaths can be averted if tap water is provided in every household. The Jal Jeevan Mission can lead to economic savings of up to \$ 101 billion or ₹ 8.37 lakh crore.

### Elements of Jal Jeevan Mission

JJM acknowledges the crucial role women play in water management and decision-making. Over 5.29 lakh village water and sanitation committees/ Pani Samitis have been constituted, with at least 50% women representation. This ensures their voices are heard and they have a say in how water resources are managed and utilized. About 22.98 lakh women have been trained for testing water samples using field testing kits.

Recognizing the potential of youth as changemakers, JJM initiatives like the Nal Jal Mitra program equip villagers with skills for minor repairs and maintenance of piped water supply systems. This not only creates local employment opportunities but also fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the water infrastructure.

JJM encourages the creation of local water enterprises, empowering communities to manage their water resources sustainably. This can involve activities like rainwater harvesting, greywater management, and water treatment, leading to economic benefits and improved water security.

A recent study - 'Assessment of Employment Potential of Jal Jeevan Mission' estimate that employment generation

potential during the construction phase is on average 59.93 lakh person-years of direct employment and 2.22 crore person-years of indirect employment and 11.18 lakh person-years of additional direct employment annually during the operation and maintenance stage.

### Transparency and efficiency

The Jal Jeevan Mission has a dashboard that gives real-time updates, progress reports, and so on, ensuring transparency and efficiency in water resource management. It also ensures continuous monitoring and surveillance of water quality parameters through advanced technologies. The Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation maintains a proactive Water Quality Management Information System. This helps detect contamination or deterioration in water quality, thereby enabling prompt corrective action and grievance redress.

As of now, there are 2,113 labs in India. Water quality testing labs of States/Union Territories are now open to the public for testing water samples at nominal rates. In 2023-24, more than 46.62 lakh water samples have been tested in laboratories which are digitised in the Water Quality Management Information System.

## INTERNAL SECURITY

## RECONSIDERING THE FREE MOVEMENT REGIME

**CONTEXT:** On January 20, 2024, at a passing out parade of the Assam police commandos in Guwahati, Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the Indian government plans to fence the 1,643 km long India-Myanmar border and reconsider the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement between the two countries.

### What is the FMR?

Much of India's northeast, including Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram, was under Burmese control until the British wrested it away in the 19th century. The Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826 cemented the current border, splitting ethnic communities like the Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups without their consent. In some cases, villages and even houses were divided between the two nations.

The Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement, which was implemented in 2018, allows residents living within 16 km of the border on either side to travel freely without needing visas or permits. Recognizing the strategic and economic importance of Myanmar, India intensified diplomatic efforts in the past decade. Proponents of fencing the border argue that it would help to curb illegal activities and improve border security. They also argue that it would make it more difficult for insurgents to cross the border and carry out attacks in India.

Opponents of fencing the border argue that it would be a costly and ineffective measure that would damage the ethnic relations. It would divide communities that have traditionally lived on both sides of the border.

The August 2017 Rohingya refugee crisis initially delayed the FMR's implementation due to concerns about potential misuse. Proponents of fencing the border argue it

would curb illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and insurgent activity. Opponents fear it would isolate communities and damage ethnic relations.

#### Looking ahead:

The decision to fence the border or reconsider the FMR remains a contentious issue. The Indian government faces the delicate task of balancing security concerns with the needs and aspirations of border communities who have long navigated the complexities of this divided landscape.

Understanding the historical context, cultural ties, and the potential benefits and drawbacks of different approaches are crucial for navigating this sensitive issue. Finding solutions that acknowledge the pain of division while fostering greater connection and cooperation holds the key to a more stable and prosperous future for both India and Myanmar.

#### Why is the FMR being reconsidered?

The vast majority of the 1,643 km long India-Myanmar border remains unfenced, facilitating cross-border movement. Security forces have long faced challenges from extremist groups operating from bases within Myanmar. The ease of movement has raised concerns about illegal activities like drug trafficking and wildlife smuggling even before the FMR.

The recent ethnic conflict between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities in Manipur has spurred calls to reassess the FMR. Manipur government's historical anxieties about "influx" of Myanmar nationals, particularly Kuki-Chins, have resurfaced. Chief Minister Biren Singh blames the conflict and drug trafficking on Myanmar nationals and wants the FMR scrapped.

Kuki-Zo organizations allege the government is unfairly targeting them as "illegal immigrants" and "narco-terrorists." Ending the FMR could disrupt essential cross-border trade and access to basic resources for communities on both sides. Concerns exist about potential economic hardship and social destabilization due to restricted movement.

Finding a balance between security concerns and the needs of border communities is crucial. Addressing the root causes of ethnic tensions and drug trafficking within both countries is vital. Any decision on the FMR should be based on comprehensive assessment and consultations with affected communities. The situation at the India-Myanmar border requires careful consideration of sensitive cultural dynamics, security threats, and economic livelihoods. Implementing comprehensive solutions that address underlying issues and respect the rights of all communities is essential for lasting stability and prosperity in the region.

#### What is the scale of migration?

The civil war in Myanmar saw a drastic jump in the number of people seeking refuge in India. In September 2022, authorities in Manipur pushed back 4,300 of some 5,500 Myanmar nationals from the Moreh area along the border after recording their biometrics. A committee set up by the State government put the number of such migrants in 2023 at 2,187. The civil war in the neighbouring country also forced some 40,000 people into Mizoram, who, unlike Manipur, made them feel at home primarily due to their ethnic

affiliation. The Mizoram government has been seeking funds from the Centre to look after the displaced people who it wants to be sent back only after the situation in their country normalises.

#### Why are Mizoram and Nagaland opposed to ending the FMR?

The Mizoram Government does not have the authority to stop the Centre from fencing the India-Myanmar border for perceived security threat and scrapping the FMR, but said he was opposed to the move. According to him, the border was imposed by the British to divide the people belonging to the Zo ethnic stock. The Nagaland government, in which the BJP is a stakeholder, has not reacted but the influential Naga Students' Federation condemned the Centre's move. It said the decision to fence the border and end the FMR was "regressive", which would exacerbate conflicts in the region. It is crucial for India to acknowledge the historical truth that these territories (between the Chindwin River in Myanmar and the Saramati mountain in Nagaland) belong to the Nagas," the federation said in a statement.

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## INTERNAL SECURITY

## EUROPEAN UNION PORTS JOIN UP IN FIGHT AGAINST DRUG SMUGGLING

**CONTEXT:** The European Union (EU) launches a “European Ports Alliance” to harmonise methods in the fight against drug smuggling and to combat the hubs’ infiltration by criminal groups. The initiative — inaugurated at Belgium’s Antwerp port, the main gateway for cocaine into Europe — is attended by EU interior ministers and representatives from 16 of the bloc’s ports and from sea transport organisations.



Europe’s major ports are currently dogged by violence from local mafias ready to do anything to maintain the lucrative illegal trade. The groups include criminal gangs in the Netherlands with Moroccan roots, and in Belgium ones with links to Albanian and Italian mafia rings.

Their tactics involve efforts to bribe or coerce dock workers, port officials, truck drivers, and customs and police officers to allow their minions to grab the drug consignments. Cocaine, coming from Latin America, is flooding the European market.

### Seizures going up

Cocaine seizures in Antwerp are soaring, reaching a record 116 tons in 2023, triggering gang violence as rival groups clash for control of the lucrative market. However, street prices are falling, indicating an oversupply despite record seizures. Nearly 70 % of drug seizures by EU customs occur at the bloc’s ports, highlighting their critical role in combating the trade.

Increased security measures at Rotterdam appear to be pushing the trade towards Antwerp. Similar crackdowns in Antwerp may be pushing activity towards smaller ports like Helsingborg in Sweden. Criminal groups exhibit remarkable adaptability, shifting both arrival and departure points for the drugs. Reinforced security at Colombian ports has driven traffickers to Guayaquil in Ecuador as the primary export hub for South American cocaine.

### Synthetic drugs

That synthetic opioid, cooked up from chemical agents often legally imported from China, has become a scourge in the U.S., where tens of thousands of overdoses are recorded every year. Currently, fentanyl use is “still on a very low level” in Europe. Several other synthetic drugs are made inside the EU, with much of the produce exported to other parts of the world.

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