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Operation Toofan: Why Kerala is launching its biggest anti-drug crackdown now

09 June 2026 | Views | By Narayan Kulkarni

Decision to launch Operation Toofan is not merely a reaction to rising crime statistics

Less than a month after neighbouring Tamil Nadu unveiled its ambitious Drug-Free Tamil Nadu Campaign to dismantle narcotics networks and curb the influence of organised drug syndicates, Kerala has announced its own sweeping offensive

against the growing drug menace. The launch of Operation Toofan: The Narco Hunt on June 2, 2026, marks one of the most extensive anti-narcotics campaigns undertaken by any state government in South India in recent years.

The timing is significant. Both Kerala and Tamil Nadu recently went to the polls against a backdrop of growing public concern over drug abuse, youth addiction, organised crime and the spread of synthetic narcotics. Against this backdrop, the Kerala government is seeking to demonstrate that it is prepared to confront a problem that many law-enforcement officials and public-health experts believe has become deeply entrenched in parts of the state.

The decision to launch Operation Toofan is not merely a reaction to rising crime statistics. It underscores a broader recognition that Kerala's drug problem has evolved from an isolated law-and-order challenge into a complex social, economic and public-health crisis. Synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine and methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) have progressively replaced traditional narcotics in trafficking networks. Their high value, ease of transportation and growing popularity among younger users have made them particularly difficult to combat. Kerala's extensive coastline, strong connectivity with Gulf countries and high levels of interstate mobility have further complicated enforcement efforts.

Why Now?

The immediate trigger for Operation Toofan is the steady rise in narcotics-related cases despite years of intensified enforcement. Kerala recorded 36,314 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, in 2025, compared with 27,530 cases in 2024. Earlier National Crime Records Bureau data had already shown Kerala leading the country in the registration of narcotics-related cases.

Government officials argue that these figures reflect both the scale of the problem and the intensity of enforcement efforts. However, they also reveal an uncomfortable reality: despite thousands of arrests, repeated crackdowns and major seizures, trafficking networks continue to adapt and evolve.

The concern is particularly acute because the nature of trafficking has changed. What was once largely associated with cannabis cultivation and local distribution networks now increasingly involves sophisticated interstate syndicates, international smuggling channels and synthetic drug laboratories. Intelligence agencies have repeatedly warned that Kerala is no longer merely a transit route but is becoming an important market for synthetic narcotics.

The initiative marks a strategic shift from reactive policing towards a more integrated approach involving prevention, intelligence gathering, technological surveillance, rehabilitation and inter-agency coordination.

What Has Kerala Done So Far?

The state government enters Operation Toofan with a substantial record of anti-narcotics activity.

One of the most visible initiatives was Operation D-Hunt, launched by the Kerala Police in 2025 under the supervision of the Additional Director General of Police (Law and Order). The operation involved extensive inspections, surveillance and coordinated raids across districts. In one major statewide drive, police screened more than 1,700 suspects, registered dozens of cases and arrested nearly 80 individuals.

Meanwhile, central agencies have played an increasingly important role.

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence launched Operation Chakravyuh in May 2026, targeting trafficking networks operating through courier systems, airports and interstate routes. The operation led to the seizure of more than 24 kilograms of narcotics, including methamphetamine, methaqualone and hashish oil, and resulted in the arrest of key operatives. During financial year 2025-26, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence's Kochi unit alone reported seizures worth approximately Rs 70.8 crore and arrested 21 individuals under narcotics laws.

Perhaps the most dramatic success came through the Narcotics Control Bureau's Operation Samudragupt, launched in 2022 to target maritime trafficking routes originating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Working with the Indian Navy and other security agencies, the operation resulted in the seizure of approximately 3.2 tonnes of methamphetamine, 529 kilograms of hashish and 500 kilograms of heroin in a series of maritime interceptions. The methamphetamine seizure was the largest in India's history and carried an estimated value of around Rs 15,000 crore.

These achievements have significantly enhanced Kerala's reputation as a state willing to take aggressive action against narcotics networks. Anti-Narcotics Task Forces, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances coordination cells and intelligence-sharing mechanisms have also been strengthened over the past decade.

Why Have These Successes Not Been Enough?

Despite these achievements, several structural weaknesses remain.

First, a significant proportion of narcotics cases involve users and low-level peddlers rather than major traffickers. Critics argue that while enforcement statistics appear impressive, they often do not reflect the dismantling of large criminal networks that control supply chains and finances.

Second, synthetic drugs are easier to conceal and distribute than traditional narcotics. Small quantities can generate enormous profits, making interdiction difficult.

Third, organised crime groups increasingly use encrypted messaging applications, online marketplaces and darknet platforms, creating challenges for traditional law-enforcement methods.

Fourth, demand remains high, particularly among younger populations. Enforcement may disrupt supply temporarily, but unless addiction and demand are addressed, traffickers often find new routes and markets.

These realities help explain why Kerala has chosen to move beyond conventional raids and arrests towards a more technology-driven and coordinated strategy.

What Makes Operation Toofan Different?

The campaign adopts a whole-of-government approach to the narcotics problem.

Unlike earlier initiatives that were largely police-driven, the new campaign integrates the Kerala Police, Excise Department, Health Department and Education Department under a unified command structure led by a designated nodal officer.

The initiative incorporates several technology-driven interventions:

- Anonymous mobile applications allowing citizens to report drug activity confidentially.
  • WhatsApp-based reporting and intelligence systems.
  • Wastewater analysis to identify areas with high levels of drug consumption.
  • Drone-assisted surveillance in vulnerable locations.
  • Dedicated cyber teams to track online narcotics transactions and darknet marketplaces.
  • Real-time intelligence sharing between agencies.

The education sector has also been brought directly into the campaign. Schools and colleges will be required to implement awareness programmes, while authorities will increase monitoring around educational institutions. The government intends to strictly enforce prohibitions on the sale of tobacco products and narcotics near schools.

In addition, Operation Toofan places greater emphasis on financial investigations. Authorities have indicated that vehicles, properties and other assets linked to drug trafficking will be targeted through confiscation proceedings under existing legal provisions.

This shift signals a growing recognition that dismantling the financial foundations of organised crime may be more effective than merely arresting individual offenders.

Budget Allocation: Is It Enough?

Ambitious enforcement strategies, however, require sustained financial backing. This raises an important question: whether Kerala's current budgetary commitments are sufficient to support the long-term goals of Operation Toofan.

Kerala has already committed substantial resources to anti-drug initiatives, but questions remain about whether existing allocations are adequate.

The state government allocated approximately Rs 15 crore for anti-narcotics activities and around Rs 9.43 crore for the Vimukthi Mission's de-addiction and rehabilitation programmes. The allocations support awareness campaigns, counselling centres, detoxification facilities and enforcement operations.

While these allocations demonstrate political commitment, they appear relatively modest when viewed against the scale of the challenge.

Kerala's economy is estimated to be worth approximately Rs 14.27 lakh crore in 2025-26. Even a conservative estimate suggesting that drug abuse imposes economic costs equal to one per cent of state output would imply annual losses exceeding Rs 14,000 crore.

The current anti-drug budget therefore represents only a tiny fraction of the broader economic burden associated with substance abuse.

The Hidden Economic Cost of Drugs

The economic impact of narcotics extends far beyond drug seizures and police operations.

Healthcare systems bear the cost of treating addiction, overdoses, psychiatric complications and the long-term health consequences associated with substance abuse.

Law-enforcement agencies incur expenses related to investigations, surveillance operations, prosecutions and incarceration. With more than 30,000 narcotics-related cases being registered annually, the cumulative burden on police stations, courts and prisons is substantial.

Productivity losses may be even greater. Drug addiction affects educational outcomes, labour-force participation and workplace efficiency. Individuals suffering from addiction often experience prolonged periods of unemployment, reduced earnings and declining productivity.

Families often face additional financial burdens arising from caregiving responsibilities, treatment expenses and lost income.

When these factors are combined, the total economic burden is likely to run into several thousand crores of rupees annually. While no comprehensive estimate currently exists for Kerala, applying international benchmarks suggests that the economic burden could plausibly approach one to two per cent of state output.

Is More Funding Needed?

Many public-health and law-enforcement experts contend that additional investment will be necessary.

If Operation Toofan is to achieve its objectives, Kerala may eventually need to invest significantly more in:

- Modern forensic laboratories.
  • Cybercrime and darknet investigation capabilities.
  • Intelligence collection and data analytics.
  • Expansion of rehabilitation and de-addiction facilities.
  • Community-based prevention programmes.
  • School and college awareness initiatives.
  • Training for specialised narcotics investigators.
  • Witness protection and financial investigation units.

The state's existing de-addiction infrastructure remains limited relative to the potential scale of demand. Without stronger treatment and rehabilitation systems, enforcement alone may simply recycle users through the criminal justice system rather than addressing the underlying causes of addiction.

The Road Ahead

Taken together, these measures constitute Kerala's most comprehensive anti-drug initiative to date. They build upon years of enforcement successes, including major seizures by the Kerala Police, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and Narcotics Control Bureau. More importantly, they reflect a growing understanding that narcotics trafficking is not merely a policing issue but a challenge that affects public health, economic productivity, education and social stability.

The ultimate measure of success will not be the number of arrests or seizures but whether authorities can move beyond targeting users and low-level peddlers to dismantling major trafficking syndicates, disrupting financial networks, reducing drug availability and expanding access to rehabilitation.

The government's ambition is clear: to strike at the roots of a drug economy that has become increasingly sophisticated and deeply embedded. Achieving that objective will require sustained political commitment, stronger institutional coordination, adequate funding and a careful balance between robust enforcement and compassionate rehabilitation.

For Kerala, the stakes are high. The battle against narcotics is no longer simply about law and order. It is about protecting public health, safeguarding economic growth and preventing a generation of young people from being drawn into addiction and organised crime. Operation Toofan is the state's most ambitious attempt yet to meet that challenge.

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