

What is Dark Net?

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Why in news?

- The Narcotics Control Bureau busted a pan-India drugs trafficking network operating on the dark web with the largest ever seizure of 15,000 LSD blots in one operation.
 - LSD or **lysergic acid diethylamide** is a synthetic chemical based-drug and is categorised as a hallucinogen.
 - Possession of 0.1 gram of LSD, which is the commercial quantity for the hallucinogenic drug, invites strict legal action under the **Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act**.
- The network, which operated in the darknet and used cryptocurrencies for payments, was spread across Poland, the Netherlands, the US and various states in India.

What is Dark Net?

- Dark Net, also referred to as dark web or darknet, is a maze of secret websites which can be accessed only through encrypted channels.

- In other words, it is the hidden collective of internet sites only accessible by a specialized web browser.
- It is used for keeping internet activity anonymous and private, which can be helpful in both legal and illegal applications.

How it Operates?

- The dark web operates in secrecy using **The Onion Router (Tor)**.
 - Tor is free and open-source software for enabling anonymous communication.
 - It is an Internet based system to prevent eavesdropping and traffic analysis attacks.
- Experts say darknet is very tough to penetrate owing to its end-to-end encryption.
 - The access to darknet is possible only through specialized browsers like Tor, Freenet, I2P and Tails to surf the darknet anonymously.
- The privacy-centric browser like Tor routes the web page requests through proxy servers thus making your IP address untraceable.

The Dark Web vs. the Deep Web

- Both the dark and deep web share one thing in common: Neither can be found in search engine results.
- The difference between them primarily lies in how their content is accessed.
 - Deep web pages can be accessed by anyone with a standard web browser who knows the URL.
 - Dark web pages, in contrast, require special software with the correct decryption key, as well as access rights and knowledge of where to find the content.

What are the Uses of Dark Net?

- Nowadays, darknet has become a hidden platform meant for the sale and purchase of much of the contraband items like
 - drugs, arms, pornographic content and other illegal activities.
- Due to its ability to provide an anonymous cover, the platform has become a safe haven for criminals dealing in every kind of illegal activity.
- The matter gets complicated with the evolution of cryptocurrencies like bitcoin.
- **It is also used by people who require privacy for entirely legal reasons.**
 - E.g., the exchange of proprietary business information or communication by political activists.
 - Darknet helps to protect the right to freedom of information and online privacy of individuals and is therefore often used by journalists and other activists.
- One ethical use for the dark web is for law enforcement and threat intelligence agencies.
- These types of professionals may search the dark web for signs of cybersecurity or data breaches, illegal activity, scams or other emerging threats.

Is accessing the dark web legal in India?

- **Accessing the dark web is legal in India.** The Indian government does not recognize it as an illegal activity.
- However, this doesn't mean one is free to do whatever he/she wants.
- Various activities like child pornography, buying guns, pistols, rifles, drugs, etc. are considered to be illegal.
- Hence, the dark web is not illegal. It is the activity or the intent of a person that is taken into account while using the dark web.

What are the Regulatory Challenges in regulating the dark web?

- The biggest challenge with respect to regulation of the dark web is its encryption technique and anonymity.
- Apart from the strong encryption techniques, most financial transactions on the dark web are performed in cryptocurrencies which provide further anonymity.
- The trans-border nature of the dark web further complicates the matter.
- Ensuring **right to freedom of information and online privacy** while eliminating while eliminating the illegal activities thriving on dark web is a challenge.

What India is doing?

- In August 2021, at the BRICS meeting, India discussed the misuse of the darknet for drug trafficking during a webinar conference of BRICS nations.
 - The group of nations will soon be coming up with a solution.
- A comprehensive legislative policy to deal with this domain is being discussed.
 - It was deliberated upon in 56th All-India DGP-IGP Conference being held at UP Police headquarters, Lucknow.

Way forward

- **Implement such a system where freely available VPNs are banned.**
 - For this, the government should create an authority under the Information Technology Act, 2000.
 - The government may create a mandatory charge for VPN registration.
- **Develop close cooperation between public and private organisations**
 - It will help in dealing with the new and emerging technological challenges of the dark web, by providing solutions such as new encrypting tools, etc.
- **Foster international cooperation in the form of multilateral exchanges**
 - It will help in dealing with the challenges of the trans-border nature of the dark web.
- **Adopt China Model**
 - Many security experts argue that it is high time that India adopted the 'China model', wherein the great firewall of China, blocks Tor traffic.
 - On similar lines, The Incredible Firewall of India will affect a body-blow to flourishing darknet crime.

Source: Darknet-based drug cartel busted with 'largest ever' LSD seizure, six arrests, says NCB | The Hindu | IDSA | Times of India | Indian Express \ Techtargget