

Enforcement Crackdown in 'U.S. Donkey Route' Case

July 12, 2025 • vajiramandravi.com



Donkey Route Latest News

- The Enforcement Directorate (**ED**) and the National Investigation Agency (**NIA**) of India have intensified their investigations into human trafficking networks exploiting the “Donkey Route”.
- The donkey route is **an illegal immigration pathway** used predominantly by Indian migrants to reach the United States.
- **The ongoing probe reveals an intricate web** of traffickers, agents, fake visa consultancies, and international conduits, with grave implications for national security, human rights, and foreign relations.

Recent ED and NIA Crackdown

- **ED raids in Punjab and Haryana:** Probing money laundering linked to illegal immigration rackets.
- **NIA arrests key operatives:**
 - Arrest of traffickers linked to Gagandeep Singh, a kingpin arrested earlier.
 - Gagandeep allegedly trafficked over 100 Indians to the U.S. via Latin America, charging ₹45 lakh per person.

The Donkey/Dunki Route Explained

- **Meaning:** It refers to long, illegal, and often dangerous migration routes involving multiple country border crossings. It was popularised by the 2023 Shahrukh Khan film Dunki.
- **Journey path and hazards:**
 - **Typical route:** Starts from India → UAE → Latin American countries (Ecuador, Guyana, Bolivia, where Indian citizens can get visa on arrival or tourist visas easily) → Colombia → Panama (via Darién Gap) → Costa Rica → Nicaragua → Mexico → US.
 - **Hazards:** Dense forests (Darién Gap), risk of assault, extortion, and animal attacks. Dark, dangerous pathways/ tunnels under the US-Mexico border (e.g., Ciudad Juarez to El Paso).
 - **Cartels:** The criminal gangs operating in the vicinity of the Mexico-US border have in recent times shifted their primary business from drug trafficking to human trafficking, charging up to \$6,000 per person.

Economic Dimensions of Human Trafficking

- **Cost to migrants:** Agents charge ₹30-60 lakh, depending on the route. In a 2023 case, passengers paid ₹40 lakh-₹1.25 crore for Nicaragua-bound flights via Europe.
- **Agent networks:** Local-level agents in India connected to international kingpins, facilitating fraudulent practices like fake visas, forged documents, and forced illegal crossings.

India's Position in Global Illegal Migration

- **Trends:**
 - In **2023**, 96,917 Indians were caught/expelled at the US border (up from 30,662 in 2021).
 - According to Pew Research (2022), over **700,000 undocumented Indians in the US** — third highest after Mexicans and Hondurans.
- **Deportation data (2009-2025):**
 - **Total deported since 2009:** 15,756
 - **Highest:** 2,042 in 2019.
 - **Latest** (2025): 104 deported so far this year (as per EAM S. Jaishankar).

Variations of Illegal Migration Routes

- **Student visa route via Canada:**
 - Agents arrange admissions in dummy Canadian colleges. Students then cross into the US illegally.
 - **Cost:** ₹50-60 lakh per person.
 - **ED probe:** An international syndicate of human traffickers that includes at least 260 colleges in Canada issued student visas to “illegal migrants” to take the Canadian route to the US.
- **Case study:** Three members of a **Gujarati family** froze to death at the US-Canada border. This prompted an **ED probe** into fraudulent agents and money laundering.

Implications for India

- **National security:** Involvement of transnational criminal networks poses risks of terror infiltration and financial crimes.
- **Diplomatic concerns:** India's image as a top source of undocumented migrants can strain bilateral relations, especially with the US and Canada.
- **Human rights violations:** Migrants face extreme conditions — death, sexual assault, extortion — violating basic human dignity.
- **Policy responses needed:**
 - Strengthening emigration laws.
 - Regulating private travel and visa consultancies.
 - Enhancing bilateral cooperation on anti-trafficking.

Conclusion

- The “Donkey Route” is not just a route — it is **a symptom of deep socio-economic desperation and systemic regulatory failures**.
- While enforcement agencies like the ED and NIA have intensified crackdowns, **a comprehensive policy approach** addressing demand, enforcement, international cooperation, and public awareness is essential to tackle this complex issue.

Source: **TH** | **ET**

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/enforcement-crackdown-in-u-s-donkey-route-case/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.