

Crackdown on fake medicines

Interpol-led Operation Pangea XIV targeted sale of counterfeit health products

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More than 1.1 lakh web links, including websites and on-line marketplaces, have been taken down in an operation involving the police, customs and health regulatory authorities of 92 countries against the sale of fake and illicit medicines and medical products.

Code-named "Operation Pangea XIV", the exercise was coordinated by Interpol. Indian agencies also participated in the operation, said an official of the Central Bureau of Investigation that is the nodal body for the Interpol in the country.

The operation resulted in 1,13,020 web links being closed down or removed, the largest since the first "Operation Pangea" conducted in 2008, the arrest of 277 suspects and seizure of

potentially dangerous pharmaceuticals worth over \$23 million.

It showed that criminals were continuing to cash in on the huge demand for personal protection and hygiene products due to the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half of all the medical devices seized during the operation from May 18 to 25 were fake and unauthorised COVID-19 test kits.

In the United Kingdom, apart from the seizure of some three million fake medicines and devices worth over \$13 million, the authorities removed more than 3,100 advertising links for the illegal sale and supply of unlicensed medicines, and shut down 43 websites, Interpol said in a statement on Tuesday.

A person in Venezuela was arrested for developing



Fake surgical masks were seized as part of the effort.

an e-commerce platform on WhatsApp to sell illicit medicines. "In Italy, authorities recovered more than 500,000 fake surgical masks as well as 35 industrial machines used for production and packaging," said the statement, adding that globally, about nine million medical devices and illicit pharmaceuticals were seized.

"As the pandemic forced more people to move their lives online, criminals were

quick to target these new 'customers'," said Interpol Secretary General Jürgen Stock.

During the operation, searches of about 7.10 lakh packages led to the discovery of fake and illicit drugs concealed amongst a range of legitimate products, including clothes, jewellery, toys, food and baby products. "In Qatar, officials discovered 2,805 nerve pain tablets hidden inside tins of baked beans," said the Interpol.

The seized items included hypnotic and sedative medication, erectile dysfunction pills, medical and surgical devices like COVID test kits, masks, syringes, catheters, analgesics/painkillers, anabolic steroids, antiseptics and germicides, anti-cancer medication, anti-malarials and vitamins.