Toxic Alcohol - U.P. and Uttarakhand Death Tragedy

Why in news?

More than 100 people recently died due to toxic alcohol in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

What is the recent finding?

- Preliminary investigation has confirmed the well-entrenched system of illicit liquor outlets in the U.P., Uttarakhand region.
- Several factories producing hooch (toxic drink) in U.P. were unearthed within a couple of days of the recent deaths.
- Majority of the deaths were in Saharanpur district of U.P.
- In U.P., many communities have protested the sale of cheap liquor in pouches that are freely distributed during social events.

How is it all over India?

- Of the estimated 5 billion litres of alcohol consumed every year in India, about 40% is illegally produced.
- Cheap, locally made liquor is common in parts of rural India.
- Sellers often add methanol, a highly toxic form of alcohol, to their product to increase its strength.
- [Toxicity often comes from drinking methanol, which results in blindness, tissue damage or death.]
- The Malvani hooch tragedy in Mumbai in 2015 that killed 106 people, have been attributed to the lack of affordable liquor for the poor.
- High taxes and excise on liquor raise prices, and so cheap brews are promoted by criminal organisations.
- However, often, this is done in collusion with law enforcement personnel.
- India thus remains among the countries with a high number of alcohol-related deaths.
- Poor governance, corruption and distorted policies contribute to such periodic tragedies.

What does it call for?

- A multi-pronged plan is needed to prevent the sale and consumption of toxic alcohol.

- Illicit liquor sale should be curbed with zero tolerance, and consumption should be discouraged through social campaigns.
- Besides, reviewing of levies on less harmful beverages is also crucial to prevent the spread of cheap, harmful ones.
- At the moment, it is essential to investigate on those who participated in the sale of the lethal brew, and look into any nexus with the authorities.
- Parallelly, it is vital to upgrade the capacities of the health system to handle victims of toxic alcohol.
- Timely treatment through haemodialysis, infusion of sodium bicarbonate and ethyl alcohol can save lives.

Source: The Hindu

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