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11:00 AM | BY - PRESHIKA MA'AM



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Important words used in editorial

Illicit - illegal, unlawful, banned, prohibited, forbidden

Enforce - implement, apply, impose, execute, administer

Sustain - maintain, support, continue, endure, uphold

Prompt - incite, spur, encourage, provoke, trigger

Hooch - illicit liquor, bootleg alcohol, moonshine, spirits, firewater

Potent - powerful, strong, effective, influential, intense

Negligible - trivial, insignificant, tiny, minimal, slight

Margin - profit, surplus, gain, benefit, leeway

Nonetheless - nevertheless, however, yet, still

Allegation - accusation, claim, charge, assertion, indictment

↳ charge

Complicity - collusion, conspiracy, involvement, partnership, intrigue

Allege - claim, assert, charge, maintain, profess

Kingpin - leader, boss, chief, mastermind, ringleader

Inconclusive - indecisive, uncertain, unresolved, indefinite, unsettled

Recur - repeat, happen again, reappear, persist, return

Pilfer - steal, filch, swipe, thieve, embezzle
Toll - cost, damage, casualty,
impact, price

Precarity - insecurity, instability, vulnerability, uncertainty, risk, *danger*

Outweigh - exceed, surpass, override, compensate

Wariness - caution, care, vigilance, alertness, guardedness

Sustained - consistent, continuous, prolonged, steady, constant

Deflect - divert, redirect, turn, avert, shift | Syndicate - organization,
association, cartel, group, band

Convict - sentence, condemn, find guilty, declare guilty, judge

Loophole - flaw, gap, defect, escape clause, deficiency

Important idioms and phrases used in the editorial

Break the cycle - to stop a repeating pattern of behavior or events

Account for - to explain the reason for something / to constitute or
make up a part of something

Big fish - an important or influential person in a group/crime

Turn to - to seek help from someone/something or to start doing/using something

Perfect storm: On illicit liquor in India Weak enforcement and poor regulation sustain illicit liquor among the poor India has suffered multiple mass deaths due to consuming illicit liquor, across Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Assam, and Maharashtra. The Malwani incident in 2015, which left over 100 people dead, prompted official promises of systemic reform that never fully materialised—neither there nor elsewhere. The Pune-Pimpri-Chinchwad tragedy unfolded last week with more than a dozen victims of working-class backgrounds in poor neighbourhoods. Preliminary investigation has revealed a better than ad hoc supply chain with industry-grade methanol—the toxin behind most hooch tragedies—brought from outside the State and mixed with ethanol to produce a highly potent country liquor. The demand for licensed alcohol faces high State taxes, encouraging low-income individuals to turn to illicit liquor. On the other hand, adding industrial methanol increases the batch volume at negligible input cost, dramatically improving margins, although some people under investigation have also said during official questioning that it is not in the interest of 'regular' vendors to poison their 'customers'. Nonetheless, such operations are typically semi-visible local economies that get by on tolerance rather than secrecy, and so allegations of police and local authorities' complicity must be investigated. Early enforcement following most deadly incidents only arrests retail vendors: investigations into upstream suppliers and alleged kingpins have frequently proved uneven or inconclusive.

Indeed, these tragedies recur due to a perfect storm of factors that are able to repeatedly come together. One major regulatory gap in efforts to track methanol downstream is how easily it is pilfered and diverted for illicit liquor. Most victims are daily-wage labourers, and scholars have argued that the physical toll of manual labour creates a demand for cheap relief that, together with economic precarity and addiction, outweighs the wariness of poisonous substances. Since the victims are often from marginalised communities, the sustained political will needed to implement reforms—including better methanol accounting and affordable alcohol alternatives, required to break the cycle—is often lacking. In a 2024 analysis, public health experts found that higher prices for legal liquor push the poorest consumers toward the illicit market, which accounts for an estimated 40% of alcohol consumption in India. Likewise, total bans as in Bihar and Gujarat could deflect the market to criminal syndicates where quality control is optional and oversight is poor. Finally, legal reviews have concluded that while the big fish are rarely caught, even those arrested are rarely convicted. Without these improvements, regulatory loopholes and weak enforcement will sustain illicit liquor as a public health crisis.

1. Which of the following best explains the author's use of the phrase "perfect storm of factors"?

- (a) The simultaneous occurrence of several independent factors that collectively sustain illicit liquor tragedies.
- (b) The sudden rise in alcohol consumption due to changing social norms.
- (c) The failure of a single government agency to regulate alcohol production.
- (d) The increasing popularity of country liquor among all income groups

2. According to the passage, which of the following is **NOT** identified as a factor contributing to the persistence of **illicit liquor consumption**?

- (a) ~~Economic vulnerability among daily-wage labourers.~~
- (b) ~~High taxation on legal alcohol.~~
- ☒ (c) Availability of affordable and safe alcohol alternatives.
- (d) ~~Weak enforcement against major suppliers and syndicates.~~

3. The author's tone towards official responses after major hooch tragedies can best be described as:

- (a) Appreciative and optimistic.
- ☒ (b) Critical and sceptical.
- (c) Neutral and detached.
- (d) Sympathetic and forgiving.

4. Which of the following assumptions is most strongly implied in the passage?

- (a) Stricter punishment alone can completely eliminate illicit liquor trade.
- (b) Victims knowingly prefer illicit liquor despite having easy access to legal alternatives.
- (c) Effective reform requires both regulatory improvements and measures addressing consumer demand.
- (d) Total prohibition has been uniformly successful in reducing alcohol-related deaths.

5. Which of the following can be inferred from the passage?

- (a) Methanol is legally manufactured but may enter illicit liquor networks through diversion and pilferage.
- (b) Retail vendors are always aware that the liquor they sell contains toxic substances.
- (c) Most illicit liquor tragedies occur because consumers intentionally seek highly potent alcohol.
- (d) Conviction rates in illicit liquor cases are high, but arrests are infrequent

ENGLISH BY PRESHIKA TONGAR



Study with Preshika Ma'am



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