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### **1. Nimisha Priya case: What is 'blood money' in Islamic law?**

#### **Why in News?**

The Centre has approved transfer of funds for preliminary discussions regarding the release of Nimisha Priya from a Yemeni prison. A sum of \$40,000 will be transferred to persons concerned via the Indian Embassy in Sana'a.

Priya, who hails from Palakkad, Kerala was found guilty of murdering a Yemeni citizen in 2017. She was apprehended while trying to flee the country and sentenced to death in 2018.

Currently, Priya's mother is in Yemen, trying to waive her death penalty by paying "blood money" to the murdered man's family. What is blood money?



#### **Diyya in Islamic law**

According to Islamic law, victims of crimes have a say in how criminals are to be punished. In case of murder, this principle applies to the families of victims. Although murder is punished via the death penalty, the victim's family (specifically, heirs) may choose to "forgive" the murderer in exchange for monetary compensation.

This is the principle of diyya, or, as it is commonly referred to as, "blood money". It can be traced to the Holy Quran.

"O believers! The law of retaliation is set for you in cases of murder — a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave, and a female for a female. But if the offender is pardoned by the

victim's guardian, then 'blood money' should be decided fairly and payment should be made courteously. This is a concession and a mercy from your Lord." [2:178]

### **Rationale**

Scholars believe that the idea behind this is to encourage the virtue of forgiveness, while also providing reparative justice to the victims' family. The scriptures do not set any specific amount as compensation, with the sum generally arrived at via negotiation between the murderer's family/representatives and the victim's family. Some Islamic countries, however, have set minimum compensation amounts.

The \$40,000 payment being made now is to get negotiations started. Eventually, Priya's family will likely have to pay close to \$300,000-\$400,000 to waive the death penalty. The 'Save Nimisha Priya International Action Council', formed in 2020, is in the process of raising required funds.

### **The Nimisha Priya case**

After becoming a qualified nurse, Priya moved to Yemen in 2008. In 2011, she married Tomy Thomas in Kerala, with whom she returned to Yemen. She worked as a nurse, while he worked as an electrician. Both, however, dreamt of starting their own clinic. But as per Yemeni law, this required them to partner with a local.

This is where Talal Abdo Mahdi comes into the picture. A regular at the clinic where Priya worked as a nurse, the couple approached Mahdi for help. Mahdi even came to Kerala in 2015, to attend the baptism of Priya's daughter. While Priya returned to Yemen, the civil war prevented her husband and daughter from doing so. They remain in Kerala.

In Yemen, Mahdi decided to take advantage of Priya. He opened a new clinic but refused to share his income with her. He also allegedly forged documents to show her as his wife.

According to Priya's family, what followed was a cycle of physical and sexual abuse. Priya was unable to leave because Mahdi had taken all her travel documents and passports. He also did not allow her to speak to her family in Kerala.

One fine day, Priya, with the help of fellow nurse Hannan, tried to allegedly sedate Mahdi, in order to obtain her papers. But an overdose led to his death. Panicking, the duo decided to chop Mahdi's body up, and dump it in a water tank. Both were eventually arrested.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; NRIs

Source: Indian Express

## **2. Who or what is responsible for Hajj deaths in Saudi Arabia?**

### **Why in News?**

Arabic-language social media has been flooded this week with shocking images from Saudi Arabia. The pictures and videos show people who were undertaking their once-in-a-lifetime Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca collapsed on the side of the road or slumped in wheelchairs, apparently close to death or dead. They are dressed in traditional pilgrim's white, their faces

covered with cloths. In several pictures, corpses appear to have been left where they presumably collapsed.



What started as a rumor on social media was confirmed as the weeklong Hajj pilgrimage ended: Hundreds of pilgrims have died in Saudi Arabia, evidently due to extremely high temperatures and lack of shelter or water.

#### **What led to death?**

Temperatures in Mecca, Islam's holiest city, rose to 51.8 degrees Celsius (125 degrees Fahrenheit) during the course of the annual event, which started late last week.

Around 1.8 million Muslims from all over the world had been expected in Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. One of the world's largest religious gatherings, the Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every Muslim who is able to is supposed to perform it at least once in their lifetime.

According to AFP news agency, which has been tallying up fatalities via different sources and countries over the past few days, the death toll has topped 1,000.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Source: Indian Express

### **3. What happened in the Kallakurichi district of Tamil Nadu? How is spurious liquor made and why does it have deadly effects?**

#### **Introduction**

As on June 20, at least 38 people had died after consuming spurious liquor in the Kallakurichi district of Tamil Nadu while as many as 82 others were receiving treatment in hospitals.



### **What is the alcohol in liquor?**

Liquor is differentiated by its alcohol content — from the 5% or so of beer to the 12% or so of wine to the 40% or so of distilled spirits (all by volume). In the beverages consumed for recreational purposes, the alcohol in question is almost always ethanol. In this context, ethanol is technically a psychoactive

drug that, in low doses, reduces the level of neurotransmission in the body, leading to its typical intoxicating effects.

Contrary to popular belief, the World Health Organisation has found “no level of [its] consumption is safe for our health”. Long-term use leads to dependence, heightens the risk of some cancers and heart disease, and may eventually cause death.

Ethanol ( $C_2H_5OH$ ) is one carbon atom bonded to three hydrogen atoms and one more carbon atom; the second carbon atom is also bonded to two hydrogen atoms and the hydroxyl group, also known as the ion  $OH^-$ . Inside the body, ethanol is metabolised in the liver and the stomach by alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH) enzymes to acetaldehyde. Then, acetaldehyde is transformed into acetate by aldehyde dehydrogenase (ALDH) enzymes. The adverse effects of alcohol consumption, from the hangover to a cancer, are due to acetaldehyde.

### **What is spurious liquor?**

Spurious liquor is characterised by the liquid mixture containing methanol as well. Often, spurious liquor including arrack sellers purchase methanol from factories and sold it to the victims (Arrack is distilled from the fermented sap of the palm tree).

In many older cases, spurious liquor has typically been a homemade liquor to which methanol was added to strengthen the intoxicating effects (in colloquial parlance, its ‘kick’) and/or to increase its bulk volume. The Food Safety and Standards (Alcoholic Beverages) Regulations 2018 stipulate the maximum permissible quantity of methanol in different liquors. These values span a wide range, including “absent” in coconut fenny, 50 grams per 100 litres of country liquor, and 300 grams per 100 litres of pot-distilled spirits.

### **What is methanol?**

The methanol molecule ( $CH_3OH$ ) consists of one carbon atom bonded with three hydrogen atoms and one hydroxyl group.

Schedule I of the Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemical Rules, 1989 includes methanol. The Indian Standard IS 517 applies to how the quality of methanol is to be ascertained and, together with the Tamil Nadu Denatured Spirit, Methyl Alcohol, and Varnish (French Polish) Rules 1959, what signage methanol packaging should carry.

The most common way to produce methanol is to combine carbon monoxide and hydrogen in the presence of copper and zinc oxides as catalysts at 50-100 atm of pressure and  $250^\circ C$ .



In the pre-industrial era, going back to ancient Egypt, people made methanol (together with several other byproducts) by heating wood to a very high temperature.

Methanol has several industrial applications, including as a precursor to acetic acid, formaldehyde, and aromatic hydrocarbons. It is also used as a solvent and as antifreeze. In Tamil Nadu, the manufacture, trade, storage, and sale of methanol requires licences under the 1959 Rules.

### **How does spurious liquor kill?**

The deadliness of spurious liquor arises from methanol. In almost every hooch tragedy in the history of India – and of the world since 1945 – the poison has been methanol. The human body contains infinitesimal quantities of methanol (4.5 ppm in the breath of healthy individuals, per a 2006 study) as a result of eating some fruits. But even for an adult, more than 0.1 ml of pure methanol per kilogram of body-weight can be devastating.

Once ingested, ADH enzymes metabolise methanol in the liver to form formaldehyde (H-CHO). Then ALDH enzymes convert formaldehyde to formic acid (HCOOH). The accumulation of formic acid over time leads to a condition called metabolic acidosis, which can lead to acidaemia: when the blood's pH drops below its normal value of 7.35, becoming increasingly acidic. The blood's pH is normally maintained by a balance between an acid, like carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), and a base, like the bicarbonate ion (HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>). The 'metabolic' in 'metabolic acidosis' means the concentration of the bicarbonate ion is dropping, leading to the acid gaining the upper hand. Formic acid also interferes with an enzyme called cytochrome oxidase, disrupting cells' ability to use oxygen and leading to the build-up of lactic acid and contributing to acidosis.

According to a paper published by the journal Archives of Toxicology in January 2022, consuming methanol also leads to "methanol-induced optic neuropathy ..., a serious condition that may result in long-term or irreversible visual impairment or even blindness [due to] damage and loss of function of the optic nerve and retina".

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express