21st June, 2024

1. <u>The U.S.-Saudi Agreement, from Fist-bump to Embrace</u> GS 2 (International Relations)

• Why in News: The evolving dynamics of the U.S.-Saudi relations is marked by a historical "oil-for-security" arrangement and the current negotiations for a Strategic Alliance Agreement (SAA), which aims to address mutual domestic and regional ambitions.
• Why in News: The evolving dynamics of the U.S.-Saudi agreement, from fist-bump to embrace
• The U.S.-Saudi agreement, from fi

The Layers to the Agreement

- **Bilateral Relations**: The proposed SAA would formalize the U.S.-Saudi alliance into a strategic defense pact similar to the U.S.-Japan treaty, potentially including the provision of F-35 stealth fighters and nuclear technology for peaceful use.
- Regional Impact: Saudi Arabia seeks a ceasefire in Gaza and progress towards a two-state solution for Israel-Palestine. In return, the U.S. expects Saudi Arabia to recognize Israel and limit its foreign policy ties with China and Russia.
- Economic Implications: The SAA could ensure that a significant portion of projects under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 benefits American companies, maintaining economic coordination despite the U.S. no longer depending on Saudi oil.

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The Hurdles

- Bilateral Trust Deficit: Historical events like the 2019 attack on Saudi oil facilities and U.S. actions during the Yemeni war have eroded trust. Saudi Arabia's increasing ties with China and Russia and its reconciliation with Iran also pose challenges.
- Gaza Conflict: The ongoing conflict makes it politically difficult for Saudi Arabia to reconcile with Israel. U.S. Senate approval for the SAA requires significant progress towards peace in Gaza and a two-state solution.
- **Geopolitical Tensions**: Regional stability is crucial for the SAA. Events such as Hamas' attack on Israel and shifting alliances indicate the complex geopolitical landscape that the U.S. and Saudi Arabia must navigate.

India's Stakes

- Regional Stability: An SAA could enhance stability in the Gulf and West Asia, which is beneficial for India's economic and strategic interests.
- Economic Opportunities: The agreement might create new opportunities within the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.
- Strategic Policy: India should continue its "Act West" policy independently, while monitoring developments between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

2. <u>Limbless Amphibian in Kaziranga National Park</u>

GS 3 (Environment)

Why in News: A team of herpetologists conducting a rapid survey in Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve has
made a notable discovery. For the first time, they recorded the presence of a striped caecilian (Ichthyophis spp),
a limbless amphibian.

What are Caecilians?

- Caecilians are a group of limbless, burrowing amphibians that resemble earthworms or limbless lizards like snakes and amphisbaenians.
- Order Gymnophiona: They belong to the order Gymnophiona, one of the three extant amphibian orders alongside Anura (frogs and toads) and Caudata (newts and salamanders).
- Habitat and Distribution: Caecilians are mostly found in moist tropical and subtropical regions of South and Central America, South and Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Terrestrial and Elusive: They are primarily terrestrial and spend the majority of their lives underground. Caecilians burrow in various habitats such as forests, grasslands, savannas, shrublands, and wetlands.

- Anatomy: Caecilians lack limbs and have no appendicular skeleton or shoulder girdle. Their spine shows a kink where the pelvic girdle once was, reflecting their adapted burrowing lifestyle.
- Caecilians play a vital role as indicator species, reflecting environmental conditions and contributing to pest control.

About Kaziranga National Park

- State: Assam
- It was declared as a National park in 1974 and as a Tiger Reserve in 2006. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985.
- It is also recognised as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International.
- **Area:** Covers an area of approximately 1,307.49 square kilometers.
- Biodiversity: Home to the world's largest population of Indian one-horned rhinoceroses. Also hosts significant populations of tigers, elephants, wild water buffalo, and swamp deer.
- It receives the highest legal protection and strong legislative framework under the provisions of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Indian Forest Act, 1927

Limbless amphibian found in Kaziranga for first time

3. India - Bangladesh Bilateral Relationship **GS 2 (International Relations)**

- Why in the News: Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is on a two-day visit to India.
- India Bangladesh Bilateral Relationship:
 - India and Bangladesh share bonds of history, language, culture, and multitude of other commonalities.

Historical Ties:

- India's relationship with Bangladesh dates back to the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War when India provided crucial military and material assistance to help Bangladesh gain independence from Pakistan.
- However, the relationship deteriorated in the mid-1970s due to boundary disputes, insurgency, and water-sharing issues, especially after military regimes took control in Bangladesh.
- Stability in bilateral relations was restored when Sheikh Hasina became Prime Minister in 1996, leading to the signing of the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty.
- Since then, India and Bangladesh have strengthened their cooperation in various sectors, including infrastructure, connectivity, and defense.

Economic and Commercial Ties:

- Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia, with bilateral trade reaching USD 15.9 billion in FY 2022-23.
- Bangladesh exports approximately USD 2 billion to India annually.
- In 2022, both countries completed a joint feasibility study on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).
- This agreement is crucial as Bangladesh will lose its Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026, which will impact its duty-free and quota-free access to Indian markets.
- Consequently, Bangladesh aims to finalize a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India.

Bangladesh PM arrives today for 2-day State visit

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE



ginning Friday.
This will be the first incoming bilateral State visit by a foreign leader after the formation of the new government follow-ing the Lok Sabha elections. Hasina was among the seven

hood who attended the swearceremony

Rashtrapati Bhavan on June 9. Modi and Hasina are sched-uled to hold talks on Saturda. Both sides will likely sign agreements for cooperation across several sectors

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced the visiton Thursday. "At the invita-tion of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina will pay a state visit to India on June 21 and 22. This will be the first incoming bilateral state visit after the formation of the govent in India following 18th Lok Sabha elections," it said

in a statement. Apart from holding bilateral consultations with Modi, the visiting leader is scheduled to call-on President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, the MEA said.

External Affairs Minister S taishankar is scheduled to call on

Hasina on Friday evening, The statement said: "India and Bangladesh share deeprooted bonds of history, lan-guage, culture, and multitude of other commonalities. The out-standing nature of bilateral ties



Hasina

is reflected in an all-encompass-ing partnership based on sover-eignty, equality, trust, and understanding. This partnership has evolved as a model for bilateral relations for the entire region and beyond." The first half of 2024 has wit-

nessed a spur of bilateral interactions between the two coun-tries — after Prime Minister Hasina assumed office in January 2024 after her consecutive fourth term victory, Prime Minister Modi held a telephoni conversation on 8 January 2024

Newly appointed Bangladesh Foreign Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud paid an official visit to India from 7-9 February 2024. This was his first bilateral official visit abroad after assuming charge as Bangladesh Foreign nister in January 2024.

Hasina participated in the Munich Security Conclave as her first official visit abroad after as-suming charge, and Jaishankar met her on the sidelines

Foreign Secretary Vinay vatra visited Dhaka from 8 to 9 May 2024 to sustain the mo-mentum of visits and exchanges between both countries.

During 2023, intense engagements took place at the leaders'-level. Both Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline on 18 March 2023 through video conferencing

Hasina also participated vir-tually in the Inaugural Session of the Voice of the Global South Summit on 11 January 2023 and the second Virtual Voice of the Global South Summit on 17

■ Power and Energy:

- **♦** Bangladesh imports 1160 MW of power from India.
- Projects like the Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant and India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline are key initiatives.
- ◆ India supports Bangladesh's energy sector through various partnerships.

■ Development Partnership:

- ♦ India has extended four Lines of Credit to Bangladesh amounting to USD 8 billion for infrastructure development.
- High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) are a significant part of India's assistance, focusing on human resource development and capacity building.

■ Cultural Cooperation:

- ◆ Cultural exchanges are facilitated through the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre and Indian Cultural Centre in Dhaka.
- Programs in arts, dance, and language promote people-to-people contacts.
- ◆ The Bangladesh Youth Delegation program attracts young talent to visit India.

PM Sheikh Hasina's visit to India:

- Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is on a two-day visit to India.
- This will be the first incoming bilateral State visit by a foreign leader after the formation of the new government following the Lok Sabha elections.
- Sheikh Hasina was among the seven leaders from India's neighborhood who attended the swearing-in ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on June 9.
- During the bilateral meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina, Teesta water dispute is expected to be discussed.

Controversy on the Teesta Water Dispute:

■ Background:

- The Teesta River originates in the Pauhunri mountain of Sikkim, flows through West Bengal, and enters Bangladesh, joining the Brahmaputra.
- It is the second largest river in West Bengal after the Ganga, making it crucial for both West Bengal and Bangladesh.

■ Historical Context:

- ◆ India and Bangladesh have been negotiating the sharing of Teesta waters since the early 1980s.
- A water-sharing agreement was almost signed in 2011 during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Bangladesh. However, it was halted due to last-minute objections by West Bengal's Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

■ Recent Developments:

- In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Dhaka, accompanied by Mamata Banerjee, and expressed confidence in finding a fair solution.
- Despite efforts, the issue remains unresolved. In a recent interview, Prime Minister Hasina emphasized the need for India to be more accommodating to resolve the dispute.

■ Current Status:

- ◆ Bangladesh seeks an equitable share of the Teesta waters to ensure sufficient water flow during the dry season.
- India's internal political dynamics, particularly the stance of the West Bengal government, play a significant role in the negotiations.

■ Importance of Teesta Waters:

- ◆ The Teesta River is vital for irrigation and water supply in both countries.
- ◆ Sheikh Hasina recently urged India to show greater flexibility to resolve the issue.

4. National Testing Agency (NTA)

Recent events of importance

• Why in News: Following the cancellation of the UGC-NET examination by the Centre, the National Testing Agency (NTA) is under scrutiny with calls for its abolition.

About the National Testing Agency (NTA)

■ Established by the Centre in 2017, the NTA is an **autonomous body** responsible for conducting entrance examinations for higher educational institutions.

■ Role: The NTA manages the entire process of exam preparation, delivery, and evaluation in a rigorous and scientific manner. It collaborates closely with subject matter experts and psychometricians.

■ The NTA is governed by a board comprising 14 members, including the chairman.



- Key Examinations Conducted: The NTA administers various prominent exams, including:
 - ◆ NEET (National Eligibility cum Entrance Test) for medical admissions.
 - ◆ UGC-NET (National Eligibility Test) for determining eligibility for lectureship and Junior Research Fellowship.
 - ◆ JEE Main (Joint Entrance Examination) for admission to IITs and NITs.
 - CMAT (Common Management Admission Test) for management programs.
 - ◆ GPAT (Graduate Pharmacy Aptitude Test) for pharmacy programs.

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024

- The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024 aims to prevent "unfair means" in order to "bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the public examinations system".
- Exams come under the Act:
 - ◆ Union Public Service Commission (UPSC): Civil Services Examination, Combined Defence Services Examinations, Combined Medical Services Examination, Engineering Services Examination, etc.
 - ◆ Staff Selection Commission (SSC): Group C (non-technical) and Group B (non-gazetted) jobs in the central government
 - Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs): Groups C and D staff in the Indian Railways
 - Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS): for nationalised banks and regional rural banks (RRBs)
 - ◆ National Testing Agency (NTA): JEE (Main), NEET-UG, UGC-NET, the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), etc.
 - Section 9 of the Act states that all offences shall be cognizable, non-bailable, and non-compoundable.

5. Hooch

Recent events of importance

- Why in News: Recently, at least 34 people have died, and around 100 others have been hospitalised after consuming hooch, or spurious liquor, in Tamil Nadu's Kallakurichi.
- About Hooch:
 - It is a commonly used term for **poor quality alcohol**, derived from Hoochinoo, a native Alaskan tribe that was known to produce very strong liquor.
 - Unlike branded liquor which is produced in factories with sophisticated equipment and rigorous quality control, hooch is made in much **more crude settings**.

• How is hooch produced?

■ All alcohol is produced using two basic processes: **fermentation and distillation**.

- Fermentation: When heated, yeast reacts with sugar (from grain, fruits, sugarcane, etc.) to ferment and produce a mixture containing alcohol. This is an age-old process, used to create beverages like beer or wine.
- Limitation: As fermentation continues, and alcohol levels rise, conditions in the mixture become toxic for the yeast. Eventually, no more fermentation can take place. Thus, to make anything stronger (above 14-18% ABC), beverages need to be distilled.
- **Distillation:**This is the process of **physically** separating alcohol from a fermented mixture using evaporation and condensation.
- Since different parts of the mixture have different boiling points, heating it up to the correct temperature makes it possible to separate only the alcohol from the water and other remnants. Distilled beverages, or spirits, are far more potent than any fermented beverage.

Why can hooch be dangerous?

- The fermented mixture which is distilled contains more than just consumable alcohol (ethanol). It also contains methanol, an industrial alcohol which is highly toxic for human beings.
- Non-distilled alcoholic beverages like wine contain relatively harmless trace amounts of methanol. But during the distillation, both ethanol and methanol are concentrated. Thus, if done incorrectly, distillation can lead to an end product which contains high quantities of toxic methanol.

What are the effects of spurious liquor?

- Methanol or methyl alcohol can cause impaired vision, high toxicity and metabolic acidosis, a condition in which the body produces excessive acid that cannot be flushed out by kidneys.
- The treatment for this is to intravenously administer Fomepizole and ethanol. However, fomepizole can be expensive and unavailable in many parts of India.
- In such cases, doctors administer a mixture of ethanol and water (1:1 ratio).

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Ethanol inhibits methanol's conversion into toxins and helps in flushing it out of the body either naturally or through dialysis.

HOOCH

The name for cheap, homespun alcohol is derived from Hoochinoo, an Alaska tribe known for its potent liquor

around 100 others are hospitalised after consuming hooch in Tamil Nadu's Kallakurichi.

What is hooch?

What is hooch?
Unlike branded liquor which is produced in factories with sophisticated equipment and rigorous quality control, hooch is made in more crude settings. It may be disagreeable to one's taste buds, and is simply meant to intoxicate. But when prepared improperly, it can kill.

How is hooch made? All alcohol is produced using to sic processes: fermentation and

FERMENTATION: When heated. HERMENIATION: When heated, yeast reacts with sugar (from grain, fruits, sugarcane, etc.) to produce alcohol in a process called fermentation. Beverages like beer and wine are made using this process. But there is a basic limitation. The alcohol produced is toxic to the yeast. Thus, fermentation stops when the mixture is roughly 15% alco-

when the mixture is roughly 15% alco-hol by volume.

DISTILLATION: This process physi-scally separates alcohol from the fer-mented mixture by taking advantage of the differing boiling points of the mix-ture's various constituents. Distilled bev-erages, or spirits, are far more potent than fermented beverages.

Hooch is produced by distilling a fer-mented mixture separally info active

mented mixture, generally of locally available yeast, and sugar or fruit (often fruit waste). Most often, multiple rounds of distillation are carried out to produce more potent alcohol.

Why can hooch be dangerous?

Why can hooch be dangerous? Hooch producers use avery rudimen-tary distilling setup, often just a big wat to boil the mixture, a pipe that captures and carries the alcoholic fuimes, and another pot where concentrated alcohol con-denses. There is no temperature control mechanism, unilie in alcohol factories. This comes with an inherent risk.

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Fermentation does not only produce consultation of the consultation of



A typical setup to produce hooch

degrees Celsius, lower than that of ethanol (78.37 degrees Celsius). This ethanol (78.37 degrees Celsius). This means that during distillation, methanol is first collected, which must be dis-carded. Only alcohol collected after the mixture reaches 78.37 degrees Celsius should eventually be consumed. At the sametime, distillers need to also keep the temperature of the mixture under 100 temperature of the mixture under 100 degrees Celsius, or the boiling point of

degrees Celsius, or the boiling point of water, above which they will produce a very watered-down product.

There is no way hooch-makers can carry out this process with the degree of accuracy needed to make it safe. In fact, they often err on the side of caution (keep temperatures high), and then resort to adulteration to make their product potent. Adulterants such as organic waste and battery acid, however, are them-selves very dangerous. They make hooch more intoxicating, and can also be deadly if present in high enough concentrations.

How does hooch impact the body?

Methanol can cause impaired vision, high toxicity, and metabolic acidosis, a condition in which the body produces excessive acid that cannot be flushed out by the kidneys.

the kidneys.

The treatment for this is to intra-venously administer fomepizole. venously administer fome However, fomepizole can be exp and is unavailable in many parts of India. In



MCQ Current Affairs 21st June, 2024

1. With reference to Pro-tem Speaker, consider the following statements:

- A. The Speaker Pro-tem is appointed by the President of India.
- B. As per constitutional provisions, the senior most member of the house shall be appointed as the pro tem speaker.
- C. Speaker Pro-tem presides over the first sitting of the Lok Sabha and administers the oath of office to the newly elected Members of Parliament (MPs).

How many of the statements given above are correct?

- a) One only
- b) Two only
- c) All three
- d) None

2. What is the primary goal of The Trinity Challenge (TTC), recently seen in the news?

- a) To improve global education systems
- b) To enhance agricultural productivity
- c) To create data-driven solutions for global health threats
- d) To promote sustainable urban development
- 3. "Capsaicin", recently seen in the news, is a/an:
- a) new TB drug
- b) newly discovered critical mineral
- c) ozone-depleting agent
- d) botanical irritant found in chili peppers

4. Consider the following statements with reference to the Human African Trypanosomiasis:

A. It is caused by protozoan parasites and transmitted by infected tsetse flies.

B. It is one of the neglected tropical diseases.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) A only
- b) B only
- c) A and B
- d) Neither of two

5. Consider the following statements with reference to the Hooch:

A. It is produced by fermentation and distillation methods

B. The Methanol presence in this Hooch cause impaired vision, high toxicity and metabolic acidosis.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) A only
- b) B only
- c) A and B
- d) Neither of two

Answers Current Affairs 21st June, 2024

