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CHANGING DIETARY HABITS IN INDIA

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS "CHANGING DIETARY HABITS IN INDIA". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "SOCIAL JUSTICE" SECTION OF GS2 IN THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

- India, like many nations worldwide, is experiencing a significant "nutrition transition." This transition is marked by rapid changes in dietary habits, with a noticeable departure from traditional, fiber-rich diets towards more Westernized eating patterns. Urbanization and economic growth have spurred this shift, leading to a surge in the consumption of packaged and processed foods, commonly known as "junk foods."
- These processed foods are often nutritionally deficient, lacking essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber while being high in calories, fats, salt, and sugar. Classified as High in Fats, Salts, and Sugars (HFSS) foods, scientific research highlights the adverse health effects associated with their consumption. From weakening the body's immune defenses against infections to increasing blood pressure, spiking blood sugar levels, causing weight gain, and even elevating the risk of cancer, the detrimental impacts of junk food on health are well-documented.

According to a study conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and published in 2023, the burden of metabolic disorders in India is alarmingly significant. The study reveals that:

- Approximately 11% of the population in India is affected by diabetes.
- Hypertension, or high blood pressure, affects around 35% of the population.
- Nearly 40% of individuals are grappling with abdominal obesity.

These findings underscore the pervasive nature of metabolic disorders in India, highlighting the urgent need for effective strategies to address these health challenges.



GOVERNMENT EFFORTS

- In 2013, the **Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark ruling**, asserting that any food item posing a hazard to public health infringes upon the fundamental right to life guaranteed under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. This ruling laid a solid constitutional foundation for protecting consumers from unhealthy foods.

In alignment with this principle and recognizing the paramount importance of promoting public health, the **Government of India has undertaken various initiatives** to encourage healthier dietary habits and active lifestyles. Key among these initiatives are Eat Right India, the Fit India Movement, and the Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (Poshan) 2.0.

Acknowledging the vulnerability of children to the advertising of unhealthy foods, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) introduced the Food Safety and Standards (Safe food and balanced diets for children in school) Regulations in 2020. These regulations impose restrictions on the sale of High Fat, Salt, and Sugar (HFSS) foods in school canteens, mess premises, hostel kitchens, or within a 50-meter radius of school campuses.

Furthermore, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights has recently taken action against a leading health drink company, issuing notices to evaluate and withdraw misleading advertisements, packaging, and labels that falsely portray the product as a "health drink." The commission cited concerns over the product's high sugar content and its potential adverse impact on children's health.

NEGATIVE IMPACT OF HFSS FOOD

- **Obesity:** HFSS foods are typically calorie-dense and low in nutrients, which can contribute to weight gain and obesity when consumed regularly.
- **Cardiovascular Disease:** The high levels of fats, salt, and sugar in these foods can increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, and stroke.
- **Type 2 Diabetes:** Regular consumption of HFSS foods can lead to insulin resistance and an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes due to elevated blood sugar levels.
- **Dental Health Issues:** Sugary snacks and drinks contribute to tooth decay and cavities, leading to poor dental health.
- **Nutritional Deficiencies:** HFSS foods often lack essential vitamins, minerals, and fiber, leading to nutritional deficiencies and poor overall health.
- **Digestive Problems:** Processed foods with high levels of fats and preservatives can disrupt digestion and lead to gastrointestinal issues such as bloating, constipation, and diarrhea.
- **Weakened Immune System:** The consumption of HFSS foods has been linked to a weakened immune system, making individuals more susceptible to infections and illnesses.
- **Mental Health Impacts:** Studies have suggested a link between the consumption of HFSS foods and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- **Definition of HFSS Foods:** The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) should expedite the process of defining High Fat, Salt, and Sugar (HFSS) foods specifically tailored to the Indian context. This clear definition will facilitate effective regulation and enforcement of restrictions on the sale and consumption of such foods.

- **Front-of-Pack Labeling (FOPL):** Implementing FOPL on food packaging can empower consumers to make informed choices about their dietary intake. Clear and easily understandable labels highlighting key nutritional information, such as fat, sugar, and salt content, should be prominently displayed on the front of food packages.
- **Stricter Compliance Monitoring:** Regulatory bodies like the FSSAI and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights should enhance monitoring mechanisms to ensure strict compliance with food safety regulations, especially in school environments. Regular inspections and penalties for non-compliance can deter the sale and promotion of unhealthy foods to children.
- **Educational Campaigns:** Launching public awareness campaigns to educate consumers, especially parents and children, about the health risks associated with HFSS foods can foster healthier dietary habits. These campaigns can emphasize the importance of choosing nutritious foods and the long-term benefits of a balanced diet.
- **Promotion of Healthy Alternatives:** Encouraging the availability and promotion of healthier food options, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, can steer consumers away from HFSS foods. This can be done through subsidies, incentives for food producers, and partnerships with the food industry to develop and market healthier alternatives.
- **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** Collaboration between government agencies, healthcare professionals, educators, food manufacturers, and civil society organizations is essential for implementing comprehensive strategies to tackle the issue of unhealthy foods effectively. Working together can leverage diverse expertise and resources to create sustainable solutions.

By implementing these measures collectively, policymakers can create an environment conducive to healthier dietary choices and mitigate the adverse effects of HFSS foods on public health, particularly among children.

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STAR CAMPAIGNERS IN ELECTIONS

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "STAR CAMPAIGNERS IN ELECTIONS". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "POLITY AND GOVERNANCE" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

Sunita Kejriwal, spouse of Arvind Kejriwal, the Chief Minister of Delhi, has been designated as a 'star campaigner' by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to lead its campaign efforts in Gujarat.

KEY POINTS ABOUT STAR CAMPAIGNING

LEGAL PROVISIONS

- The legal framework governing star campaigners is **outlined in Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act)**. This section pertains to the expenditure incurred by individuals designated as "leaders of a political party," commonly referred to as "star campaigners."

- Typically, these star campaigners are **prominent figures within a political party, although they may also include celebrities**. The key requirement is that these individuals must be members of the political party that appoints them.
- As per the RP Act, a **recognized political party**, either nationally or at the state level, can designate a **maximum of 40 star campaigners**. Conversely, a registered but **unrecognized party can nominate up to 20**.
- The **names** of these star campaigners **must be communicated to the Election Commission (EC) and the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)** of the respective states within seven days from the date of the election notification.
- In the case of **multi-phase elections**, political parties have the option to submit separate lists of star campaigners for each phase.
- When the **Prime Minister or a former Prime Minister** acts as a star campaigner, according to the MCC guidelines, the government **covers the expenses for security**, including those for bullet-proof vehicles. These expenses are not added to the election expenses of the party or the individual candidate. However, if **another campaigner** accompanies the Prime Minister, the individual candidate is **responsible for bearing 50% of the expenditure on security arrangements**.

RULES REGARDING EXEMPTIONS FOR THE STAR CAMPAIGNERS

- According to the RP Act, expenses related to travel by air or any other mode of transportation incurred by the 'leaders of a political party' for campaigning on behalf of their party are not considered part of the election expenditure of candidates from that party.
- In larger States, candidates' election spending is capped at ₹95 lakh per Lok Sabha constituency, while in smaller States, it's ₹75 lakh. Therefore, these star campaigners can rally support for candidates fielded by their respective parties without impacting their expenditure limit.
- **Conditions for Exemption:**
 1. The exemption applies only if the star campaigners confine themselves to general campaigning for the party. However, if during any rally or meeting, the star campaigner solicits votes for the contesting candidate(s) or shares the platform with them, the expenses incurred for such events will be counted towards the election expenditure of those candidate(s).
 2. Additionally, if the star campaigner bears boarding and lodging expenses while campaigning for any candidate(s), these costs will be included in the expenditure record of such candidate(s), regardless of whether they are paid by the candidate(s).
 3. Moreover, if any candidate(s) accompany the star campaigner during travel, then 50% of the travel expenses of the star campaigner will also be attributed to those candidate(s).

CONCERNS RELATED TO STAR CAMPAIGNERS

- **Influence Peddling:** Star campaigners, often prominent figures in politics or celebrities, may wield significant influence over voters. There's a concern that their involvement could sway voter opinions unduly, potentially undermining the democratic principle of free and fair elections.
- **Polarisation:** Star campaigners often represent specific political parties or ideologies, contributing to partisan polarisation. Their involvement may exacerbate divisions within society, making it harder to foster consensus and cooperation across party lines.
- **Disproportionate Resources:** Star campaigners often have access to considerable resources, including funding, media coverage, and logistical support. This could create an uneven playing

field, where candidates with star campaigners enjoy advantages over others, raising concerns about fairness and equality in elections.

- **Expenditures Regulations:** The involvement of star campaigners can complicate expenditure regulations. Expenses incurred by star campaigners, such as travel, security, and event arrangements, may not always be properly accounted for or attributed to individual candidates, potentially leading to violations of election finance laws.
- **Misusing Official Position:** If star campaigners hold public office or government positions, there's a risk of them using their official authority or resources for campaign purposes. This could blur the lines between government work and political campaigning, eroding public trust in institutions and violating ethical standards.
- **Diversion from real Issues:** The focus on star campaigners and their personalities may divert attention from substantive issues and policy debates during election campaigns. Instead of discussing relevant issues, campaigns might become centred around personalities and celebrity endorsements, detracting from the democratic process's purpose of informed decision-making.

WAY FORWARD

- **Reforms in Legal Framework:** Review and update the legal framework governing star campaigners to ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness in their appointment and functioning. This may involve amendments to the Representation of the People Act of 1951 to address loopholes and ambiguities.
- **Enhanced Oversight:** Strengthen oversight mechanisms to monitor the activities and expenditures of star campaigners. The Election Commission should enforce regulations strictly, ensuring that expenses are properly accounted for and attributed to the respective candidates or parties.
- **Ethical Guidelines:** Develop and enforce ethical guidelines for star campaigners to prevent the misuse of official positions, influence peddling, and diversion from substantive issues. Star campaigners should be encouraged to focus on policy debates rather than personality-centric narratives.
- **Collaboration and Dialogue:** Foster collaboration and dialogue among political parties to mitigate concerns related to partisan polarisation. Parties should prioritise consensus-building and cooperation across party lines, enhancing the inclusivity and integrity of the democratic process.

PRELIMS PRACTISE REVOLUTION

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Star campaigners must be affiliated with the political party that selects them.
2. For any given election, a recognised political party has the authority to designate up to 40 star campaigners.
3. The costs associated with the travel of star campaigners during campaigning are considered part of the election expenses of the candidate they are endorsing.

How many of the above statements are correct?

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer: A

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q1. Analyse the implications of star campaigners using their celebrity status to sway public opinion during elections from an ethical standpoint.

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