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1. Attack and retaliation, anger and restraint: Connecting the dots in the Iran-Israel hostility

Why in News?

Israel conducted a strike on Iran recently. This was in retaliation to Iran's drone and missile barrage of April 13, which was itself a response to the Israeli attack on an Iranian diplomatic building in Syria in which a top general was killed.

Reports suggested that a military base near Isfahan, the western Iranian city around which a lot of the Iranian nuclear production capability is concentrated, was hit on April 19. But no nuclear-related facilities were damaged, the global nuclear watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said.



Israel did not claim responsibility for the attack. And Iran, after some reports by the semi-official Fars news agency about explosions in Isfahan, released pictures of a peaceful and picturesque city with its lush green gardens, scintillating architecture, and brilliant blue skies.

Since then, there has been silence on both sides. What is happening?

Thus far, and no further — for now. The muted response by both sides reflected the desire to not raise the rhetoric at this time. It does appear that Israel calibrated the strike carefully — no major casualties have been reported. But Iran remains cautious, and on alert.

After the attack on Israel, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi had warned that the "tiniest invasion" by Israel would bring a "massive and harsh" response. He said this while addressing Iran's annual Army parade, the venue for which was changed to the Army barracks in north Tehran from its usual location on a highway on the southern outskirts of the capital as a precautionary measure. This suggested that Tehran was preparing for a possible strike by Israel.

The Americans likely restrained Israel.

It does appear from analysis and reporting on the subject that Netanyahu had wanted to respond to the Iranian attack, but US President Joe Biden had asked him to just "take the win" — which was the fact that Israel was able to thwart 99 per cent of the over 300 drones and missiles launched by Tehran.

Analysts have flagged Netanyahu's abiding interest in prolonging the war and dragging the US into a conflict with Tehran. However, Biden has so far resisted, especially because a desperate battle for the White House looms, and many young Democratic voters are said to be extremely upset with the US support to Israel on the Gaza war.

India would not want an escalation of the situation.

New Delhi has reached out to both Israel and Iran, and has counselled restraint. Within hours of the Iranian attack on April 13, India had expressed "serious concern" at the escalation of hostilities and called for "immediate de-escalation". After the Israeli strike of April 19, India did not issue a reaction.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has discussed the situation with both Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz. In his conversation with the Iranian minister, he "stressed the importance of avoiding escalation, exercising restraint and returning to diplomacy", and with the Israeli minister, he shared India's concern and "discussed the larger regional situation".

The ability to connect with both countries within a day of the April 13 attacks is a valuable asset, but whether India is able to leverage its neutral stance to influence the two countries' position in a shadow war is a separate question.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian express

2. IRDAI removes age bar for buying health insurance

Why in News?

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has removed the age limit for purchasing health insurance policies, with effect from April 1.

Wider coverage

Earlier, there was an age limit of 65 years to buy new health insurance policies. The IRDAI's latest move is aimed at bringing in extended health benefits to senior citizens, and caters to diverse demographic groups, including children and maternity needs.

The IRDAI directive mandates health insurance providers to develop specialised policies catering to senior citizens, and to establish dedicated channels for addressing their claims and grievances.



Towards inclusivity

What does the latest IRDAI directive say

1) Health insurance providers must develop specialised policies catering to senior citizens, and establish dedicated channels for addressing their claims and grievances

2) Companies are encouraged to develop tailored products to meet specific age-related requirements

The infographic features a background image of a hand stacking three wooden blocks with medical icons: a cross, a pill, and a first aid kit. A circular icon on the left shows a person using a walker.

Companies are also encouraged to develop tailored products to meet specific age-related requirements, fostering a more inclusive healthcare ecosystem.

Benefit of move

The recent decision to lift the age restriction on insurance coverage is a significant advancement. Now, with the removal of this restriction, even the elderly can access cashless insurance benefits, though premiums for this demographic may be higher.

This change will greatly benefit those in need of medical insurance, including children, maternity cases, and senior citizens, ensuring a healthier life for many.

About IRDAI

The IRDAI is an autonomous and statutory body responsible for managing and regulating India's insurance and reinsurance industry.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: The Hindu

3. Why are sugary processed foods harmful?

Why in News?

Over the past week, the spotlight has returned on high sugar content in flavoured malt-based milk powders and baby food. Government authorities are warning against branding such items

as “healthy” and have called out the allegedly misleading promotion and marketing tactics while loading products with added sugar.

Why is it problematic to label malt-based, sugary milk products as ‘health’ drinks?

On analysing the product in question, (a drink like Bournvita, for example,) it is observed that it contains 86.7g of carbohydrates per 100g, of which 49.8g is sugar content. Of the total sugars, 37.4g is sucrose or added sugar. For every recommended per serve of 20g chocolate powder, the consumer is downing nearly 10g of total sugar.

Apart from added sugar, the process of malting, which involves germinating cereals, drying, roasting and powdering them, also produces sugar. Malting was a process originally used to produce single malt whiskey, and is also used in making malt-based milk beverages.

Once you germinate a grain, the starch in the grain breaks down to sugar by the action of a group of enzymes called amylase. When you roast it, it develops a nice flavour as that sugar gets caramelised. Maltose is nothing but two units of glucose, a form of sugar, bonded together. Apart from added sugar, the chocolate powder contains maltodextrin, liquid glucose, maltose generated from malting process of cereals and so on.

What is FSSAI’s stand on sugar content?

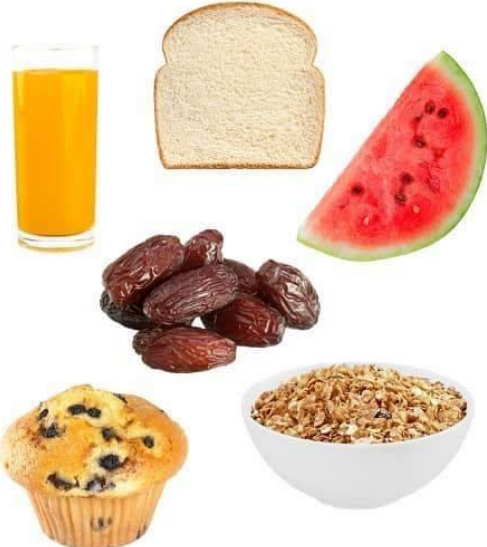

In its Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations 2018, the FSSAI said that only if total sugar is less than 5g per 100g in a product, it can claim to be ‘low on sugar.’ Any product which is ‘low on sugar,’ can potentially be ‘healthy.’ But when products do not fulfil this requirement, and still advertise or market their products as ‘health drinks,’ it is problematic. This is because if a child, for instance, takes four servings of this so-called drink, he or she will end up consuming 40 grams of sugar, which is higher than the World Health Organization’s advised threshold of consuming 25 grams or six teaspoons of sugar per day. In Indian households, one often adds extra teaspoons of sugar to a chocolate-powder drink too.

What is the controversy over baby food?

A closer look at the ingredients of Wheat Apple Cherry baby cereal for kids from eight months up to 24 months marketed by Nestlé under the brand name Cerelac in India reveals that it contains 24 grams per 100 grams of total sugars derived from milk solids, maltodextrin, dextrose and so on.

For a one to two year old child, the company recommends feeding twelve scoops or 100 grams of baby food every day. This means the baby consumes 24 grams of sugar each day. This is a harmful practice, say experts. A baby is only familiar with the taste of breast milk. Lactose, which is a naturally occurring form of sugar, is less sweet. When a child is shifted from breast milk to complementary foods, extra sugar is being fed. Extra sugar in a young baby’s diet creates unnecessary pressure on the baby’s pancreas, leading to production of excess insulin which may lead to diabetes and obesity in future. Addition of ingredients like maltodextrin to improve flavour and texture is harmful as the white starchy powder of maltodextrin has a higher glycemic index (GI) than table sugar. GI is a measure of how quickly a food causes blood sugar to rise. The excess sugar gets converted into triglycerides, a form of fat which gets stored in liver leading to fatty liver and insulin resistance that causes diabetes.

An estimated 101.3 million people in India could be diabetic, a study co-published by the Indian Council of Medical Research stated.

<h1>HIGH</h1> <h2>BLOOD SUGAR FOODS</h2>	<h1>LOW</h1> <h2>BLOOD SUGAR FOODS</h2>
	
<p>Glycemic index score >70 Cause energy spikes + crashes High blood sugar leads to diabetes</p>	<p>Glycemic index score <15 Longer lasting energy Reduce disease risk</p>

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Will an FSSAI probe be enough to curb the practice of misleading labels?

In September 2022, the FSSAI put out a draft notification which stated that high fat, sugar, salt (HFSS) food means a processed food product which has high levels of saturated fat or total sugar or sodium.

The draft notification was released to explain what a HFSS food would consist of and how to warn consumers against it on front-of-the-pack labelling of the food packet or beverage bottle. It implied that if a product derives more than 10% of total energy (kcal) from sugar and/or saturated fat, then the product was high on fat and/or sugar.

However, the FSSAI has kept the regulation open-ended on whether companies need to declare fat, sugar and salt content on the front of the pack or not. It has also batted for 'health rating stars,' and not warning labels.

"Warning labels are upfront and inform the consumers if a product is high on fat, salt or sugar. Health stars can be misleading. A consumer does not have the time or knowledge to calculate if a product is high on sugar, based on the FSSAI's definition," said an expert.

What is the way forward?

According to Food Safety and Standards (Foods for Infant Nutrition) Regulations, 2019, sugar is allowed in milk cereal-based complementary food. The regulation says that lactose and glucose polymers shall be preferred carbohydrates for food and infant nutrition. Sucrose and/or fructose shall not be added, unless needed as a carbohydrate source, and provided the sum of these does not exceed 20% of total carbohydrate. The regulation permits sugar, hence the regulation needs to be re-looked.

Hence, the first step, would be to bring about a comprehensive regulation to clearly define what is 'healthy,' and 'unhealthy,' which encompasses all beverages and food products. The underlying problem is marketing and pushing it to unsuspecting consumers.

A Hindustan Unilever Limited annual report of 2022 states that the company partnered with the Zilla Parishad of Pune in the midday meal programme to add Horlicks, cited as a 'health food drink,' to existing take-home rations, which were planned to be provided to children across 4,600 anganwadi centres covering 1.45 lakh children aged between three and six.

Also, under the Infant Milk Substitutes Act, infant foods cannot be promoted via advertisements. However, rules are flouted, and social media influencers often promote baby food.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu