



Fast Track Courts for Justice in Sexual Offense Cases

For Prelims: [Fast Track Courts](#), [Justice in Sexual Offense Cases](#), [Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses \(POCSO\) Act, 2012](#), [Indian Penal Code \(IPC\)](#), [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992](#).

For Mains: Fast Track Courts for Justice in Sexual Offense Cases.

Source: [PIB](#)

Why in News?

The performance of the [Fast Track Special Courts \(FTSCs\)](#) has been commendable, making substantial progress in expediting the trial process for cases related to [Rape and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses \(POCSO\) Act, 2012](#).

What is the Background?

▪ About:

- FTSCs are dedicated courts expected to **ensure swift dispensation of justice**. They have a better clearance rate as compared to the regular courts and hold speedy trials.
- Fast track courts (FTCs) were first recommended by the **Eleventh Finance Commission in 2000** "to substantially bring down, if not eliminate, pendency in the district and subordinate courts over the next five years".
- **Following the December 2012 Gangrape** and murder, the Union Government set up a 'Nirbhaya Fund', amended the [Juvenile Justice Act](#) and set up fast-track Mahila Courts.
 - Some other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar etc. also set up FTCs for rape cases thereafter.

▪ Scheme for Fast Track Special Courts:

- In 2019, the government approved a scheme for setting up 1,023 FTSCs across the country for **expeditious disposal of pending rape cases under the [Indian penal Code \(IPC\)](#)** and crimes under the POCSO Act.
- It also strengthens the **deterrence framework for sexual offenders**.

▪ Performance:

- As of June 2023, the FTSCs have successfully disposed of more than **1.74 lakh cases related to rape and POCSO Act**.
 - This reflects the significant impact of these specialized courts in providing speedy justice to the victims of sexual offences.
- 763 FTSCs are currently functional across **29 States and Union Territories**.
 - Among these, 412 courts are exclusive POCSO Courts.

What is the POCSO Act?

▪ About:

- POCSO Act came into effect on **14th November 2012** which was enacted in consequence to India's ratification of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992](#).
- The aim of this special law is to address offences of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of

children, which were either not specifically defined or in adequately penalised.

- The Act defines a **child as any person below the age of 18 years**. The Act provides punishment as per the gravity of offence.

▪ **Features:**

- **Gender-Neutral Nature:** The Act recognizes that both girls and boys can be victims of sexual abuse and that such abuse is a crime regardless of the gender of the victim.
 - This is in line with the principle that all children have the right to protection from sexual abuse and exploitation, and that laws should not discriminate based on gender.
- **Ease in Reporting Cases:** There is sufficient general awareness now to report cases of **sexual exploitation of children** not only by individuals but also by institutions as non-reporting has been made a specific offence under the POCSO Act.
 - This has made it comparatively difficult to hide offences against children.
- **Explicit Definition of Terms:** The storage of child pornography material has been made a new offence.
 - Further, the offence of 'sexual assault' has been defined in explicit terms (with increased minimum punishment) unlike an abstract definition of 'outraging modesty of a woman' in the [Indian Penal Code](#).

What are the Initiatives to Curb Women and Child Abuse?

- [Child Abuse Prevention and Investigation Unit](#)
- [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#)
- [The Juvenile Justice \(Care and Protection of Children\) Act, 2015](#)
- [Child Marriage Prohibition Act \(2006\)](#)
- [Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 2016](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q.1 Examine the main provisions of the National Child Policy and throw light on the status of its implementation. **(2016)**

Q.2 We are witnessing increasing instances of sexual violence against women in the country. Despite existing legal provisions against it, the number of such incidences is on the rise. Suggest Some innovative measures to tackle this menace. **(2014)**

Mizoram Pioneers Digital Health Revolution

[Source: PIB](#)

Why in News?

The [National Health Authority \(NHA\)](#) has unveiled the "100 Microsites" project, aimed at **accelerating the adoption of Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) across India**.

- Mizoram has achieved a remarkable feat by becoming the **first state to operationalize an**

ABDM Microsite in its capital city, Aizawl.

What is Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission?

- The [Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission \(ABDM\)](#) is a national initiative that aims to develop the digital health infrastructure of the country. It was launched in September, 2021.
 - Ayushman Bharat is a flagship scheme of India which was launched as recommended by the [National Health Policy 2017](#), to achieve the vision of **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**.

What are ABDM Microsites?

- **About:**
 - The ABDM Microsites are **geographically defined regions where targeted outreach initiatives** are conducted to onboard small and medium-scale private healthcare providers.
 - The Microsite project aims to ensure that all healthcare facilities, including **private clinics, small hospitals, and labs**, become ABDM-enabled and **offer [digital health services](#) to patients**.
 - An interfacing agency under this program will have an on-ground team to reach out to the healthcare providers in the area.
- **Implementation:**
 - The implementation of these microsites is primarily led by the **State Mission Directors of ABDM**, supported by the **NHA's financial resources and comprehensive guidance**.
- **Benefits:**
 - Patients can benefit from digital services such as online appointments, **e-prescriptions, e-reports, e-bills, e-consent, e-referrals, and e-feedback** at these facilities.
 - **Health records generated within these ABDM-enabled facilities** can be seamlessly linked to their [Ayushman Bharat Health Accounts \(ABHAs\)](#).
 - Furthermore, these records are accessible and shareable through any **ABDM-enabled Personal Health Record (PHR) application on mobile devices**, ensuring that patients have access to their health information at their fingertips.
- **Current Progress:**
 - Mizoram's groundbreaking achievement is not in isolation; other states, including **Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Chhattisgarh**, are also making substantial strides in implementing ABDM Microsites.
 - This collective effort signifies a nationwide movement towards achieving comprehensive healthcare digitization.

What is the National Health Authority?

- **National Health Authority (NHA)** is the apex body responsible for implementing India's flagship **public health insurance/assurance scheme** called "**Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana**".
 - It has been entrusted with the role of designing strategy, building technological infrastructure and implementation of "**National Digital Health Mission**" to create a National Digital Health Ecosystem.
 - NHA is the successor of the **National Health Agency**, which has been functioning as a registered society since **23rd May 2018**.
 - Pursuant to Cabinet decision for full functional autonomy, **National Health Agency was reconstituted as the National Health Authority on 2nd January 2019**.
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Concerns Over Consuming Ultra-Processed Food

For Prelims: Ultra-Processed Food, Food Processing Industry, [Covid-19 Pandemic](#), [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#), [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#).

For Mains: Concerns Over Consuming Ultra-Processed Food.

[Source: DTE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, a report released by [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and the **Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations** found that India's **Ultra-Processed Food Sector** grew at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 13.37 % in retail sales value from 2011 to 2021.

What is Ultra Processed Food?

▪ About:

- Processed food usually has **salt, sugar and fat added** to it. Food is considered ultra-processed if **five or more ingredients have been added** to the original product.
- These other ingredients are usually **flavour and taste enhancers, emulsifiers and colours**, and all of them are meant to **improve shelf life and taste** or make the food convenient to eat.
 - For instance, **atta in raw form is unprocessed**. Dalia, with salt and sugar added, is processed food. If we make **cookies out of atta** and add a lot of other things, **it is ultra-processed**.

▪ Concerns:

- Salt, sugar and fat are commonly added to **all processed food**. Such foods are not healthy to consume regularly or in large quantities.
- They can cause **obesity, hypertension, cardiac issues** and lifestyle diseases. The artificial chemicals added to ultra-processed food have **a negative impact on gut health**.
- Any imbalance in gut health can lead to a host of problems, from neurological **issues and stress to mood swings and obesity**.
- Most ultra-processed foods use taste enhancers, so people automatically get addicted to them.
 - On top of that, the natural food is broken down to such an extent that it gets absorbed very quickly by the body.
- The effect of high doses of simple sugar is that the body releases insulin, which makes you **feel hungry and want to eat more food**. That is why we say sugar is addictive.

What are the Key Highlights of the Report?

▪ Temporary Disruption and Rebounded:

- The [Covid-19 Pandemic](#) caused a temporary disruption, causing the annual growth rate of the Indian ultra-processed food sector to plummet from 12.65% in 2019 to 5.50% in 2020.
 - However, the sector rebounded remarkably, with an 11.29% growth recorded in 2020-2021.

▪ Dominant Categories and Sales Volume:

- The most popular ultra-processed food categories include **chocolate and sugar confectionery**, salty snacks, beverages, ready-made and convenient foods, and breakfast cereals.

- In terms of retail sales volume from 2011 to 2021, **beverages held the highest share**, followed by chocolate and sugar confectionery and ready-made and convenience foods.
- **Health Consciousness and Changing Consumption Patterns:**
 - Health-conscious consumers shifted away from carbonated sugar-sweetened beverages to **fruit and vegetable juices** during the pandemic, potentially due to their perceived immune-boosting properties.
 - However, these alternative beverages may also contain high levels of free sugars.

What are the Recommendations?

- **Stricter Advertising and Marketing Regulations:**
 - The report underscores the **necessity for stricter advertising and marketing regulations**, particularly concerning products like sweet biscuits that are popular among children.
 - The high salt content in salty snacks poses risks to consumers' health, making it crucial to address through regulations.
- **Clear Definition of High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) Foods:**
 - The [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#) should collaborate with stakeholders to establish a clear definition of High Fat Sugar Salt (HFSS) foods.
 - Linking the **tax structure with the definition of HFSS foods** through the GST Council can **incentivize healthier and reformulated options by imposing higher taxes** on products exceeding recommended levels of fat, sugar, and salt.
- **Comprehensive National Nutrition Policy:**
 - There is a need for a **robust national nutrition policy** addressing both under- and over-nutrition, with well-defined objectives and targets, after thorough consultations with stakeholders.
 - Existing policies like [Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0](#) lack comprehensive coverage of overnutrition and diet-related diseases.
- **Nutritional Transition and Long-Term Goals:**
 - The report calls for a shift towards a healthier lifestyle, emphasizing the importance of reducing the consumption of ultra-processed foods and increasing the intake of whole grains.
 - Low intake of whole grains has been identified as a **primary dietary risk factor for noncommunicable diseases in India**.

What are the Government Initiatives to Promote Healthy Lifestyle?

- [The National Food Security Act \(NFSA\), 2013.](#)
- [PM-POSHAN Scheme.](#)
- [Fit India Movement](#)

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With what purpose is the Government of India promoting the concept of “Mega Food Parks”? (2011)

1. To provide good infrastructure facilities for the food processing industry.
2. To increase the processing of perishable items and reduce wastage.
3. To provide emerging and eco friendly food processing technologies to entrepreneurs.

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

- The Scheme of “Mega Food Park” aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers, so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastage, increasing farmers’ income and creating employment opportunities, particularly in the rural sector. **Hence, 2 is correct.**
- It envisages creation of state-of-the-art support infrastructure in a well-defined agri/horticultural zone for setting up of modern food processing units in the industrial plots provided in the park with well-established supply chain. **Hence, 1 is correct.**
- “Mega Food Park” scheme has no provision for providing eco-friendly food processing technologies to entrepreneurs. **Hence, 3 is not correct. Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.**

Q. Aspartame is an artificial sweetener sold in the market. It consists of amino acids and provides calories like other amino acids. Yet, it is used as a low-calorie sweetening agent in food items. What is the basis of this use? (2011)

- (a) Aspartame is as sweet as table sugar, but unlike table sugar, it is not readily oxidized in human body due to lack of requisite enzymes
- (b) When aspartame is used in food processing, the sweet taste remains, but it becomes resistant to oxidation
- (c) Aspartame is as sweet as sugar, but after ingestion into the body, it is converted into metabolites that yield no calories
- (d) Aspartame is several times sweeter than table sugar, hence food items made with small quantities of aspartame yield fewer calories on oxidation

Ans: (d)

Mains

Q. Discuss the factors for localisation of agro-based food processing industries of North-West India. (2019)

Q. What are the challenges and opportunities of the food processing sector in the country? How can the income of the farmers be substantially increased by encouraging food processing? (2020)