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Swadeshi

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Swadeshi Activities

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Pictorial Glimpses



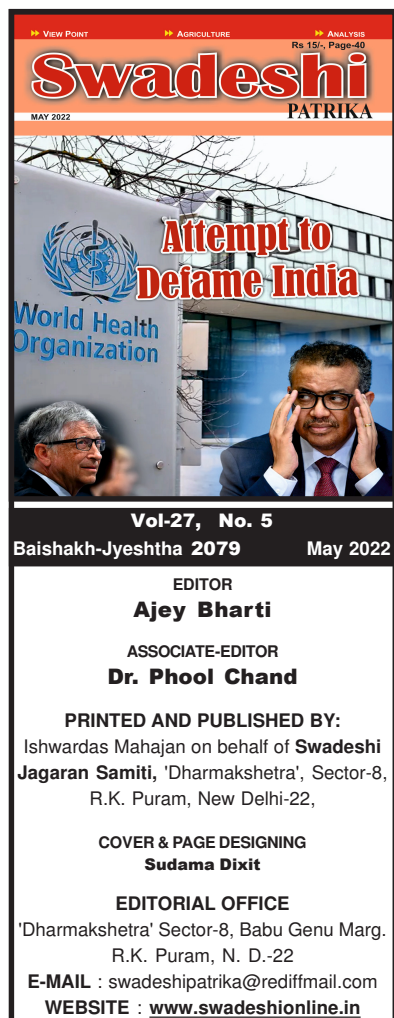
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Vichar Varg, Berhampur, Odisha (May 1, 2022)



Vichar Varg, Sundergarh, Odisha



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Atmanirbharta in Defence

Recent events in Europe and subsequent embargos placed on Russia by US led NATO countries makes the case of self reliance in defence for India even more urgent. India is a fast emerging world power and this also upsets the current world powers. Therefore an unsaid threat of trying to choke India's ascent at the world stage becomes even more real.

As per Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), out of global 2+ trillion dollar military expenditure India stood at 3rd position with 77 billion dollar spend in 2021. Even though for 2022-23 military budget, India earmarked 68% of capital acquisition from domestic firms, its share in global import remains very high at 11%. Though atmanirbharta push has reduced the imports by 21% through 2016-21, a lot remains to be done. India's defence exports have jumped from 213m\$ in 2015 to 1.5 billion\$ in 2019 but the export restrictions and over dependence on public sector has kept the exports very low and dependence on imports very high.

DRDO has managed to develop many local products for Indian defence forces (Advanced Light Torpedo (TAL), Radars, composite materials for LCA, AEW&C, Astra, LCA Tejas; ASAT, BrahMos, Nag missile, SAAW, Arjun MBT) but future wars will be more around drones, cyber-space, artificial intelligence, state of the art reconnaissance abilities, superior cyber security and modern weaponry. Fast tracking of setting up defence manufacturing corridors, heavy investment by private sector and disproportionate investment in defence research is urgently needed to equip our defence forces with the latest and the best.

A robust defence procurement policy with indigenized manufacturing abilities boosted by cutting edge research and development as well as participation of private sector is the need of the hour.

— Naresh Sharma is a Swadeshi Warrior based in Stockholm.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

SWADESHI PATRIKA

'Dharmakshetra', Sector-8, Rama Krishna Puram, New Delhi-22

■ Tel. : 26184595, E-Mail: swadeshipatrika@rediffmail.com

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Quote-Unquote



We have an exceptional semiconductor design talent, making 20% of the world's engineers.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister, Bharat



After UPI, another game changing idea to democratise commerce - ONDC soft launched to select consumers, sellers and logistics providers. Get ready for a world of choice, convenience and transparency.

Piyush Goyal
Minister of Textiles, Commerce & Industry
and Consumer Affairs, Bharat



Agriculture means care for the land. It involves regeneration of biodiversity, living soil & health of people & planet. Careless technologies including Agri chemicals derived from fossil fuels & giant harvesters running on fossil fuel destroy biodiversity, soil, climate, health.

Dr. Vandana Shiva

Indian scholar, environmental activist, food sovereignty advocate, ecofeminist and anti-globalisation author.

Sri Lankan Crisis and India

Sri Lanka has been going through very serious economic problems for some time now. Sri Lankan government is seemingly clueless about how to deal with this crisis, which is believed to be first of its kind for the country. There is no consensus in the government about how to deal with this situation.

Sri Lanka had come out of a very painful civil war in the past, which continued for 26 years and ended only in 2009. But despite the severity of the civil war at that time, Sri Lanka did not experience any big economic crisis. The rampant inflation in food and fuel in Sri Lanka, after January this year followed by acute shortage of goods is making life hell for the people of Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka's per capita income in the year 2020 on the basis of market exchange rate was recorded at \$4053 annually and on the basis of purchasing power parity, it was \$12537 annually, which was more than double of that of India. If we talk about human development, according to the Human Development Report of the United Nations (2020), Sri Lanka ranked at 72nd position in the world, whereas India was at 131st position.

Sri Lanka's credit rating has been significantly lowered by international agencies, pushing Sri Lanka out of the international capital market. As a result, Sri Lanka could not reschedule its foreign borrowings. The devaluation of Sri Lanka's currency started due to the paucity of foreign exchange, and when Sri Lanka tried to curb imports, it led to shortage of commodities, especially fuel and food, causing hyperinflation. The Sri Lankan government believed that by curbing imports, foreign exchange would be saved and domestic production would be encouraged, which would also increase exports. But this could not happen and the foreign exchange reserves kept depleting further. The Sri Lankan government had to sell its gold reserves and enter into currency swap agreements with India and China to prevent any default in repayment of international debt.

Behind Sri Lanka's crisis is China's old strategy of debt trap. Not only Sri Lanka, but many more countries of the world have been trapped by China. Story starts with Sri Lanka accepting China's proposal for development of Hambantota port, without any feasibility study. Between 2007 and 2014, China gave five loans amounting to \$1.26 billion for the development of this port, in the beginning at 1 per cent or 2 per cent, but later escalated to 6.3 per cent with short repayment periods. After that China invested \$1.4 billion in Colombo port city project. Billions of dollars in loans have been given to Sri Lanka by China, for developing a seaport, airport, highways and power stations. By 2020, Sri Lanka's total liability to China had increased to about \$ 8 billion (2020), but these projects are far from earning adequate revenues for debt servicing, even today.

Sri Lanka suddenly decided to move towards completely organic farming, in a very irresponsible manner and chemical fertilizers were banned. Due to the ban on the import of chemical fertilizers, agricultural production was affected badly and the prices of agricultural commodities started increasing wildly. Due to this the export of tea also got affected significantly. Although there is no harm in organic farming, but doing the same in an unmindful manner is no good.

While government revenues were already declining, the Sri Lankan government's reckless reduction in direct and indirect taxes made matters even worse. Due to compulsion to increase government spending, the budget deficit widened; leading to inevitable increase in money supply, and therefore inflation.

Sri Lanka has been importing a lot of essential goods for consumption; and when imports were banned, naturally there was a shortage of food and fuel. Sri Lanka's exporting industries were also affected due to non-availability of imported raw materials and essential intermediates. Due to which Sri Lanka's exports decreased significantly. China has provided billions of dollars in loans to Sri Lanka for developing a seaport, airport, highways and power stations. While the country's debt liability to China has increased to about \$ 8 billion (2020), these projects have yet to yield adequate revenues for debt servicing.

Significantly, Sri Lanka is home to a large number of Tamil people, who migrated from Tamil Nadu centuries ago. In view of the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka, a large number of Tamil refugees are reaching the Tamil Nadu coast. Naturally, humanitarian help to them will be the priority of the Government of India and State government of Tamil Nadu. Apart from this, the government has given a credit line of \$ 1 billion to Sri Lanka and has also given assistance of \$ 500 million to buy essential petroleum products. Apart from this, the Sri Lankan government has sought additional assistance of \$ 1.5 billion from the Indian government.

At the global level, the international organizations will have to come united and respond to this ill-fated effort of China. In addition, the Government of India may provide humanitarian and commercial assistance to Sri Lanka, and help them with an action plan for Sri Lanka's sustainable development. For this, the revival of Sri Lanka's agriculture, apart from rescheduling of debt and repayment of the sovereign debt; help in ending instability caused by the lack of raw materials in industries, ensure availability of essential commodities for the common people; are some other contours of India's help to Sri Lanka. These endeavours can help India earning goodwill of Sri Lankan people; trapped in the clutches of China, and take it on the path of development once again. Today, when China's ill-fated strategy has been fully exposed, this is an important opportunity to defeat its ill designs to disturb peace in Indian Ocean and remove its shadow from the region.

Attempt to Defame India



A report published in the New York Times (NYT) on April 16, 2022, quoted the World Health Organization (WHO) as saying that India is hindering the World Health Organization's effort to accurately assess the deaths due to COVID infection. On the basis of that report, opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has said that whereas 40 lakh deaths have occurred in the country due to COVID, only 5 lakh deaths have been reported by the government.

The Government of India has registered a strong objection to this report. Government of India has said in a press release, that, while NYT has not been able to get data for other countries, it's selectively quoting data for India on behalf of WHO. It seems that the 'cooked' data of the WHO is being used mischievously with the intention of defaming India.

Today, while the whole world is appreciating India's vaccination program, with more than 90 percent of eligible population already vaccinated, it seems that the WHO officials are deliberately trying to undermine India's outstanding performance and achievement by questioning the government's published figures of deaths due to COVID in India.

WHO is re-estimating the death toll due to COVID in the whole world, and has concluded that actually many more deaths have occurred during pandemic, as compared to what various governments have declared. However, the major cause of concern is that WHO, while giving estimates of 0.9 millions extra deaths, over and above earlier figures, of 0.6 millions; more than one third of the difference between the two estimates is being reported from India. It is worth noting that the NYT quoted the WHO as saying that while it was being reported by all countries that some 60 lakh people died due to Covid, in reality this figure is 150 lakh. This figure is more than twice, what has been reported by different countries. But out of the 90 lakh additional deaths that are being reported, 35 lakh are said to be from India. That is, the WHO is trying to say that 40 lakh people died due to COVID in India instead of 5.2 lakhs declared by the government.

WHO is being quoted as saying that this figure of deaths is not only of direct deaths from COVID, but it also includes the deaths of those who were suffering from other illnesses and who died during the period as they couldn't get medical aid due to the lockdown during COVID. However, the big difference in the figures comes from direct deaths due to COVID only.

Concerns have been raised by the Government of India over this act of the WHO. The Government of India has issued a press release saying that the World Health Organization has adopted double standards to estimate the figures of deaths. For 'Tier-1 nations', under which sources say about 80-90 countries have been counted, WHO has accepted official estimates as authentic; for other types of countries (Tier-2 countries), which include India, a mathematical modeling



World Health Organisation is trying to defame India by questioning the statistics of COVID related deaths. The Government of India should give a befitting reply to these attempts.

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan

process has been adopted. The government has said that no justification has been given for dividing the countries into different categories. The government has further said that if the mathematical model that has been adopted for the second type of countries, it needs to be authenticated by applying the same model to the Tier-1 countries as well, which the World Health Organization has failed to do. The government has said that it has written six letters to the World Health Organization and lodged its objection regarding this process five times in virtual meetings, to which the WHO did not give any satisfactory answer. "They have looked at numbers from 18 states to arrive at the figure. They have not revealed the sources of the data used to compute the final estimate. We do not even know which states these are," a government source has said.

WHO's Mess

The World Health Organization, is an organization under the auspices of the United Nations that is responsible for protecting the health of the people all over the world. It is expected from WHO, that in case of health disaster in any part of the world, it should take appropriate steps itself, and also advise the governments for the appropriate measures.

Perhaps citing this, the World Health Organization argues that the correct assessment of deaths during COVID will help in making the right policies in the context of such pandemics in the future. Although there is no fault in this argument, the World Health Organization has actually lost trust of the world, because the same been mired with

controversies due to its mis-actions during the pandemic itself.

At first instance, there was a lack of honesty on the part of World Health Organization in the assessment of the cause of infection. Significantly, on January 14, 2020, the World Health Organization said in a tweet that there is no evidence of human-to-human transmission of this infection. However, this infection was spreading since September 2019. This tweet by WHO misled countries around the world that it will not spread from humans to humans. All countries continued with their international passenger flights. Due to this negligence on the part of WHO, this virus of Wuhan, China became the cause of great devastation all over the world. After a long time, testing was started at international airports, and a process of quarantine was also adopted.

Not only this, the World Health Organization also tried to hide that the infection originated from China's Wuhan Laboratory, and against a strong opinion around the world, WHO kept arguing that it originated from the animal market of China. Most of the experts around the world rejected this claim of the World Health Organization. It's strongly believed that Mr. Tedros, became Director General, WHO, of this organization only through the support of China. In such a situation, the head of the World Health Organization could not afford to displease China.

Realizing this mess of the World Health Organization, the then US President Donald Trump decided to stop the contribution of \$ 0.4 billion being given by America to this organization. It is worth noting that the WHO re-

ceives predetermined contributions from countries around the world, as well as many types of voluntary contributions. Major contributions to the voluntary funding of the WHO come from the Bill Melenda Gates Foundation, other so-called philanthropy organizations, and the United States, China, and many other developed countries. Various organizations, including Gates Foundation, have influence over the functioning of the World Health Organization.

It is worth noting that when India was moving fast towards manufacturing a vaccine on its own, the top officials of the World Health Organization were dismissing our efforts as 'vaccine nationalism' saying that it will delay the development of vaccine and therefore elimination of infection. Not only this, Bill Gates was heard saying that he is not in favor of sharing the vaccine formula to countries like India, because it will affect the quality of the vaccine. Under pressure from 'Gavi', an affiliate of the Gates Foundation, the World Health Organization was also pressuring India to make a binding commitment to buy the vaccine being made by large multinational companies, under Covax facility.

Today, when India is not only successful in manufacturing vaccines and has vaccinated almost its entire population, is dealing with pandemic much better than most of the other countries of the world, becoming almost self-reliant in medicines and equipments, World Health Organisation is trying to defame India by questioning the statistics of COVID related deaths. The Government of India should give a befitting reply to these attempts. □□

Edible Oils: Growing Foreign Dependence and High Disease Burden



Processing and heating of palm oil causes glycidyl fatty acid esters (GEs.) to form. When digested, these GEs break down and release glycidol, known for its carcinogenic effects in animals.

The same may be suspected in humans. Taking palm oil along with medications that also slow blood clotting might increase the risk of bruising and bleeding.

Prof. Bhagwati Prakash Sharma

The policy shift introduced in the 1990s, paving way for blending of edible oils with imported palmolein and other cheap oils, along with import facilitation of non-conventional oils has turned India from an erstwhile edible oil exporter to an import dependent country with a high disease burden. Consequently, the traditional domestic oils like mustard, sesame and groundnut oils have largely been replaced by palm oil and soybean oil to the tune of 75% in last 3 decades. Now these non-conventional oils have been believed to be leading to increased disease burden, comprising coronary heart disease cancer, thrombosis, certain ailments of brain and so on.

So, further incentivizing “oil-palm” cultivation and promotion of palm oil against the traditional oils would further aggravate and jeopardize the health profile as well as lead to further economic centralization in the edible oils sector. Indeed, decentralized production in the edible oils sector, by promoting traditional oils and oil seed cultivation can generate manifold more jobs, with more inclusive economic growth. Wider participation of the people in farming and non-farming jobs in the edible oils sector is possible through conventional oil seeds, as it would promote oil expellers across the villages, instead of large solvent and extraction plants.

Edible Oils, Health Profile and Disease Burden

Edible oils are not mere cooking media for food items. But, they are key sources of nutrients, necessary for proper functioning of heart, brain, body, muscles and nervous system along with the endocrine environment. Beyond this, they can as well be a very rich source of micronutrients and bioactive substances such as alkaloids, carotenoids, and polyphenols. Since, the edible oils are one of the main components of our diet, especially in India, it is important to compare the nutritional and biological effects of different oils. There is a wide variety of edible oils in the market and most common among these vegetable oils today include palm oil, soybean oil, groundnut oil, mustard oil, cottonseed oil, sesame



oil, sunflower oil, corn oil, and coconut oil etc. Each of these oils has different composition, characteristics and physiological action. Oils play an important role in the nutrition, causation of diseases, immunity patterns and treatment management of diseases. Genetic expression is also found to be affected by the fats found in oils constituting the diet.

Palm Oil: A Major Health Hazard

Palm oil is made from the fleshy part of the palm fruit, and it contains 52 percent saturated fatty acids. Saturated fatty acids of palmolein are hazardous to cardiovascular health. Besides, oxidized palm oil presents even greater health risks. The oxidization occurs during processing for culinary use, generating toxins that adversely affect the heart, liver, kidneys and lungs. Raw, unprocessed palm oil isn't associated with these effects, when fresh. However studies link a boost in atherosclerosis development in as little as six months while reheating palm oil to cook foods.

Moreover Carcinogenesis from palmolein is also emerging as major health concern. Processing and heating of palm oil causes glycidyl fatty acid esters (GEs.) to form. When digested, these GEs break down and release glycidol, known for its carcinogenic effects in animals. The same may be suspected in humans. Taking palm oil along with medications that also slow blood clotting might increase the risk of bruising and bleeding.

Soybean Oil and Genetic Degeneration in Brain

In a new study at the University of California (UC) Riverside, researchers reported a link between soybean oil and genetic

changes in the brains of mice. Researchers in 2015 examined the potential contribution of soyabean to cause obesity and diabetes and reconfirmed it. Soybean oil has shown impact on the brain especially changes in the hypothalamus, a brain region associated with a number of functions like body weight, metabolism, body temperature, reproduction and stress response.

The researchers also concluded that certain genes in the mice that were given soybean oil weren't operating properly, identifying about 100 of them. They noticed one particular gene that produces oxytocin, also known as the love hormone, and essential for parent child bonding seemed to be impaired in mice who ate soybean oil. Among those mice, oxytocin levels were lower than normal. When the researchers tested coconut oil on the mice, they found it didn't produce as many gene changes in the hypothalamus as the soybean oil did.

From Exporter Status Bharat has become Import Dependent

Traditionally, India has been an exporter of edible oils before Independence and had remained self-sufficient in edible oils up to 1994. Several post-Independence policy changes, including import facilitation since early 1970s has turned the country import dependent with elevated disease burden due to policy bias in favor of palmolein and soybean oils. In spite of policy shifts in favor of import of edible oils, of 1970s and 80s oils, India regained its self-sufficiency in the early 90s from 1991-94. But, as a result of several policy

blunders, now we have turned into the biggest importers of edible oils in the world. India imports around 65-70% of edible oils, worth more than US \$ 12 billion (Rs 90,000 crore). This constitutes more than 65% of our annual edible oil requirement of 23 million tones.

The ethnic cuisine, traditional ayurvedic wisdom and the concern for health, had led to the preference for mustard oil in north and east India, coconut oil in south India, ground nut or cottonseed oil in west India, and sesame oil in Rajasthan. Sesame oil is described to slow the aging process and promote all-round health of the consumers. In 1973-74, the healthy traditional oils like groundnut, mustard, sesame and cottonseed oils had a thumping 96% share in total consumption of edible oils which has come down to 25% today. Traditionally the oil industry was highly decentralized, wherein, in most of the blocks, towns and even villages indigenous oil expellers and expelling clusters were widely spread. The oil seeds were traditionally extracted by cold pressing and then this oil was filtered. This technology suited to small scale processing, leading to perpetual employment for generations in oil cultivation, expelling and trading. It also encouraged localized procurement. Thus, it was an ecologically more sustainable system to avoid long distance transport, involving pollution.

It was since 1976 that the government banned the use of ground nut oil and mustard oil for making vanaspathi to help vanaspathi industry to turn more profitable by use of imported cheap palmolein which was never used in food till then in the country help palmolein

Discussion

exporters as well. The palmolein became the main stay of the vanspati industry for enhanced profiteering at the cost of human health. It rendered oil seed cultivation less remunerative due to dumping of cheap palm oil. So, the whole ecosystem was dismantled. It had a detrimental effect on the growth of domestic decentralized edible oils sector, affecting cultivation and local expelling a losing proposition for farmers as well as domestic MSMEs operating in edible oils sector. Its production stagnated at around 10 billion tonnes of oilseeds between 1970 to 1986, while the growing population had considerably pushed the demand up. But, the government passed on these benefits to foreign exporters of cheap palmolein for unknown reasons. Thus, a vicious cycle was put in place to eliminate oil seeds domestic cultivators, decentralized expellers and small traders. Thousands of oil industry clusters vanished in the country. The 95% reliance on domestic edible oils maintained in the 1960s and 1970s, fell down to 70% since 1980 for few years which has currently dwindled to 30-35%.

To reverse this import dependence, in the year 1977 the then finance minister, H M Patel in the Morarji cabinet had advised Amul cooperative federation for an "Operation Flood" like project for edible oils via a farmers cooperative network based on Amul model for self-reliance in edible oils through NDDB, for improved farmer livelihoods for oil seeds growers, local producers and traders. The Dhara brand was introduced and it brought the prices of domestic oil at par with cheaper imported edible oils. NDDB and

GCMMF worked together and launched several varieties of filtered and refined mustard oil, cottonseed oil, and double filtered groundnut oil etc. The well established Amul distribution network facilitated marketing of domestic oil. So, by 1991-92, Dhara attained sales of 1, 32000 M T pa, which was around 50% of the organized sector.

The area under oilseeds cultivation which has stagnated between 15-18 million hectares between 1970-85, increased to 25 million hectares by 1991 and the oilseed production which had stuck at around 10 million tonnes between (1970-85) had went up to 18 million tonnes in 1991. India once again begun to produce 98% of its edible oil requirement by 1990-91. The oilseed growers also begun to revive and thrive. The period between 1990-94 was been for the Indian oil seeds growers and decentralized edible oil industry, as well as for the domestic trade in edible oils.

This self-sufficiency continued till the Narsimha Rao government signed the agreement forming WTO in 1994 and brought edible oils under OGL (Open General License) list for imports with lowered import duty of 65%. By 1998 we again started importing around 30% of our edible oil when the duty was lowered to 15%. This move obliged the foreign suppliers and facilitated dumping of palm oil into India, leading towards a death knell for conventional domestic edible oils sector.

Conspiracy of Aluteration of Mexican Poppy Oil

Soon, a conspiracy played 'havoc' when mustard oil was

found to be adulterated with Argemone Mexicana (Mexican Poppy) oil. This caused spread of deadly dropsy disease across the north India. The government then banned the open sale of edible oils and imported huge quantity of palmolein and other oils. It led to the closure of hundreds of thousands of oil expellers and wiped out indigenous edible oil clusters and discouraged oil seeds cultivation. Consequently, today India has to import 65-70% of its edible oil requirements.

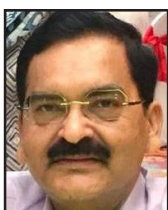
Way Ahead

The way ahead to curb the disease burden, being caused from edible oils and to promote oil seed cultivation and growth of decentralized edible oils sector for more job creation with participatory economic growth, the conventional and healthy oils like sesame, mustard and ground nut oils should be promoted. Hence, now instead of promoting oil palm cultivation, production and consumption of palm oil, government should promote healthy conventional oils like sesame, mustard, groundnut etc. in a mission mode, as it had done to promote self-sufficiency in pulses. High Yielding varieties of conventional oil seeds with higher oil content can also be planned. Cultivation of conventional oil seeds need to be incentivized in the same way as was done in case of pulses through bonus price over the MSP. It would also promote greater employment generation in the decentralised oil expelling sector. Whereas palm and soybean oils facilitate only large scale solvent extraction plants for extraction of palmolein and soybean oil along with raising disease burden for masses in the country. □□

India: Reset Terms of Engagement

It is time for India to summon courage to tread an independent path in world affairs, notwithstanding the enormous pressure to toe the line suggested by one major power or the other. The present Russian-Ukraine war is testing our resolve. Perhaps west did not expect the Indian response being what it is in face of unfair Russian invasion and consequent western retaliation, including the economic sanctions. Yet, while the west has issued not so subtle threats to India, no concrete action has been taken, nor has India budged from its position. Instead, India has admonished the west to not lecture on taking the 'appropriate' stance, especially when its own record has been murky, especially when China tried to invade India in recent past. While India has responded the way it has partially because of the fact that Russia is a major defence supplier and partly because Russia is embracing China with a firm grasp, let us understand that actually the foreign policy assertion is in consonance with Modi's renewed resolve to preserving strategic autonomy in the world order. To be sure, even Nehru had set for itself the goal of pursuing an independent foreign policy.

No doubt since Modi government came to power eight years ago, India has enthusiastically tried to build its ties with the U.S. and Western Europe, especially, as some would say, in view of the presence of a hostile neighbor, China. This was further catalyzed with the latest formation of the group of four nations, the Quad, where again India made common cause with the US. Many analysts therefore concluded that India has joined the Western camp, partially to offset the growing might of Russia-China nexus. Jaishankar, our foreign minister, of course led by the PM, has put paid to this conclusion more than once on many platforms. India's increasing global heft is primarily an outcome of its calibrated strategic positioning in a new world order that is no longer dominated by the west and yet it is far from being controlled by rising power China (with help from Russia). The powers of the West are waning, especially when the rivals have understood that west (Washington and its allies) will not intervene in the ongoing war so long as NATO territories remain unharmed.



Under the dynamic leadership of PM Modi India's foreign policy has shed it's diffidence and ambivalence. Self interest is the sole guiding force.

KK Srivastava



Yet, the fact remains that the Western grouping is still the wealthiest global grouping. It still has a firm grip on world's financial, cultural, and even academic institutions plus the media. This soft power helps it weave the popular narratives. It seeks to achieve its professed aims through deployment of diplomatic and coercive powers.

Russia and China are finding common cause because on one hand Russia has been crowded out from the global high table (and many Eastern European countries joining NATO), while on the other China perceivers increasing threat from groupings like Quad, AUKUS, ASEAN, etc. Both are pushing against West. While Russia is upping the military ante in its neighbourhood, China is challenging the Western economic and governance model. In this background, the West is finding it perplexing as to why India is not on its side. But India is following a policy of enlightened self-interest amid the shifting sands of geopolitics that is now permanently in flux. Indeed, this ever transient state is helping India since on one hand it can build its military set up, and on the other it can sign mutually beneficial trade deals with nations of all hues to move towards becoming a five trillion economy.

During the recent India-US 2+2 dialogue India firmly articulated the independence of India's foreign policy. Not only that, it has convinced US (and most recently Boris Johnson, of the UK) to accept New Delhi's position on Russia. No doubt the Indo-US relations were further strengthened. Yet, it did not present the foreign minister from chiding the Western world on being hypocrite on issues like hostile invasions or violation of human

And now even the US administration has conceded to the fact that while India wishes to further cement its relationship with US, this will not come at the expense of severing-or even limiting – meaningful ties with Russia.

rights or challenges to democratic institutions in India, particularly in the background of Western world's less than stellar record on all these counts. India thus showed its firmness, and even defiance in face of western coercion. India is showing to the world that it has the sole agenda of growing strong without tilting in either direction-Russia or US – and yet forge fruitful ties with all those who matter to achieve this goal. It has decided, and communicated this fact to the rest of the world, that it will stand firm against any kind of bullying economically, militarily, or diplomatically.

Since Nehru's times the core tenets of India's foreign policy have always been to play a balancing game with rival camps (mainly US and erstwhile USSR) by pursuing partnerships with all great powers of the time (China was not so mighty then). And now even the US administration has conceded to the fact that while India wishes to further cement its relationship with US, this will not come at the expense of severing-or even limiting – meaningful ties with Russia. The world is not unipolar, and in a multipolar world order, the only sensible realpolitic stance would be to refrain from tilting excessively in

either direction. The only guiding force should be the hawk eyed focus on managing the self interest. India has amply demonstrated this resolve through words and action on global theatre in wake of Ukraine crisis. India needs to take care of its own interests without being intimidated.

India needs to acquire economic heft through domestic industrialisation and modernization. It should also work in the direction of plural financial and digital systems that are not the monopoly of any one nation or few institutions. It should seek a balance of power in its immediate neighbourhood, rather in Asia and the whole of the world. When the cold war ended, the post war scenario failed to accommodate all sides in fair manner. The 'defeated' power – Russia – is now refusing to accept the US and EU formulation of defence security architecture handed out to it. This is the primary reason for the current crisis. India should aim at connecting with Eurasia. Closer home it should build a counterforce to Chinese influence by deepening ties with its own neighbours. It should catalyze a beneficial trade and investment system at global level by flexing its economic muscles. And it should emphasize the fact that it is a multivilization world, sans the dominance of any one that we live in.

It is time the world comes to term with an assertive India which refuses to be dictated and defined by the west. India is looking at the possibility of convergence of interests of all players; it is refusing to play ball to the classic western approach; are you with us or against us? We are committed to only our self interest. □□

Ayurveda and Yoga spearhead India's medical diplomacy

India's medical tourism sector, largely confined to allopathic treatment (barring Kerala), received a major fillip with the World Health Organisation selecting India to host the first and only WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM). Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mauritius Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and WHO Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus, laid the foundation stone of the Centre in Jamnagar, Gujarat, on April 19, 2022. Interestingly, Mauritius has been observing Dhanteras as Ayurveda Day since 2017.

India's Traditional Medicine systems (Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Sowa Rigpa of the Himalayan ranges) and other world traditions will now be studied and preserved at the GCTM. Jamnagar was selected as it established the world's first Ayurvedic University five decades ago, and hosts the Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda. The Traditional Medicine industry has been growing exponentially since 2015, and is currently worth \$18.1 billion annually. It is expected to touch \$23 billion by 2022-23. The central budget for Ayush promotion for 2022-23 has been raised to Rs 3050 crore.

Yoga at Olympics

The intangible benefits of Yoga have long been recognised across the spectrum. Yoga is now being clinically studied at NIMHANS, AIIMS, and S-VYASA, for its therapeutic value in the treatment of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, hypertension, and psychological problems like depression that is known to cause loss of grey matter in the brain. Yoga helps in memory loss associated with mild cognitive impairment.

Breathing techniques taught in Yoga expel bodily impurities and heal the body in a non-invasive manner. Yoga is compatible with other medicinal systems. The Integrated Oncology Guidelines framed in 2014 with European and US participation found Yoga helped cancer patients to cope with fatigue, nausea, and depression. Western doctors are urging recognition of Yoga and insurance coverage for yoga therapies.



India's Traditional Medicine systems (Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, and Sowa Rigpa of the Himalayan ranges) and other world traditions will now be studied and preserved at the Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM).
Sandhya Jain



India has now taken a quantitative leap by promoting Yoga as a sport to attract children and the youth. This, combined with the pull of International Yoga Day (June 21) could make Yoga a truly global phenomenon and eventually have it accepted as an Olympic sport. This requires acceptance in at least 80 countries; so far, 35 are on board.

The National Yogasana Sports Federation, affiliated to the World Yogasana Sports Federation, believes that making Yogasanas an Olympic event would expand awareness of yoga and its myriad mental and physical health benefits. It began laying the foundations for this goal by conducting national championships in yoga in 30 states; a world championship will be held later in 2022. Interestingly, the first World Yoga Championship was held in 1989 in Montevideo, Uruguay, so this may not be a very far-fetched ambition.

NYSF president Udit Sheth points to the need to train coaches and judges, besides the athletes. Curriculum is being framed for teaching asanas, standardising the system of scoring, and refining the asanas with the aid of technology and artificial intelligence. Using the Karate Model, where white to black belt indicates the level of accomplishment, the federation in 2015-16 prepared eight levels of learning, with four levels for coaches. In 2018-19, the Indian Yoga Association met at the Coimbatore ashram of Jaggi Vasudev to hone the agenda; Swami Ramdev helped refine asanas appropriate for a competitive format. To enhance the appeal of the sport, the federation has asked the centre to include Yoga in the proposed Ayush Visa for foreigners coming to India for treatment or study.

GCTM

The WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine will be a game changer for traditional medicine which, for millions across the world, is often the first line of treatment. It will create a database of traditional knowledge systems using technology; create international standards for testing and certification of traditional medicines to enhance confidence in these medicines; evolve as a platform for global experts of traditional medicines to share experiences; and perhaps host an annual traditional medicine festival. The GCTM will mobilize funding for research in traditional medicines and develop protocols for holistic treatment of specific diseases so that patients could benefit from both traditional and modern medicine. It has been tasked to ensure that indigenous communities benefit from their intellectual property.

The Government of India has extended a grant of US\$ 250 million to the GCTM. As many as 170 out of 194 WHO Member States use traditional medicine, and their governments urged WHO's support in creating a body of reliable evidence and data on traditional medicine practices and products.

The medicinal value of plants has been known to diverse communities across regions who shared this knowledge freely, without putting a price on it, an "open source model", as Prime Minister Narendra Modi put it. Ayurveda and Yoga together offered India holistic health for over five thousand years. During the Covid pandemic, both proved especially helpful for India and the world, boosting immunity and countering stress.

The post-Covid world offers

enormous scope for Traditional Medicine systems, and vast employment opportunities in the creation of supply chains, diagnostic tools, telemedicine. For farmers, it offers an opportunity to grow medicinal plants and trees; the FSSAI is currently finalising regulations for exports and framing guidelines for Ayush Aahar.

The Centre plans to launch an Ayush Visa for medical tourists seeking Ayurveda treatments in the country, especially in the Himalayan Hill States where infrastructure is being developed to facilitate wellness centres. An Ayush Mark will help in branding products to certify quality. The union ministries of *Ayush* and Commerce and Industry are also setting up an Ayush Export Promotion Council.

An Ayush-pedia online portal on the lines of Wikipedia has been proposed, and the Charak Ashram of Kotdwar will be recreated with help from the Archaeological Survey of India.

Sowa-Rigpa

An episode in the epic, Ramayana, shows Hanuman going to the Himalayas to get a life-giving herb for Laxman. The National Institute of Sowa-Rigpa, set up in Leh in November, 2019, provides free medicine and therapy through OPD and regular camps. A Sowa-Rigpa Traditional Knowledge Digital Library has been set up with CSIR-TTKDL Unit Delhi. Traditional healers are being trained to strengthen public health in remote areas, and the cultivation of endangered and commercially viable medicinal plants of the Trans Himalayas encouraged.

Sowa-Rigpa, Science of Healing in Bhoti (Tibetan) is one

of the oldest, living, and well documented medical traditions in the world. Widely practiced in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Darjeeling, and Tibetan settlements in India, as well as Central Asia, it was formally included under the Ayush system of medicines in 2010. The visual examination of urine is a distinctive diagnostic tool in this system, besides examination of the tongue and pulse.

Medicinal plants

As a vast number of pharmaceutical products are based on natural substances, mainly plants, there is urgent need to conserve biodiversity and sustainability. The popular aspirin derives from the bark of the willow tree, the contraceptive pill from the roots of wild yam plants, and child cancer treatments have been based on the rosy periwinkle. Nobel-prize winning research on artemisinin for malaria control can be sourced to ancient Chinese medicine texts.

Modern scientific methods are now being utilised to study traditional medicine. Artificial Intelligence is used to screen natural products for pharmacokinetic properties, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is used to study brain activity and the relaxation response following meditation and yoga.

Medicinal plants thus offer a huge opportunity for farmers. However, most pharmaceutical companies at the Global Ayush Investment and Innovation Summit (GAIIS) voiced concerns over sourcing of materials. They mooted protocols for growing medicinal plants, with national level certification, training of staff, labs, etc. The National Medicinal Plant Board

The Union Science and Technology Ministry has proposed joint research and a joint PhD program with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

could set up a Digital Platform and notify the khasra number of each field from where plant material is taken. All plants must be organic, no urea or fertilisers used.

Industry leaders mooted sales through the Forest Department, as is the practice in the north east. Alternately, villages can be organised at district level. Medicinal plant farmers could form a consortium to provide data on industry needs from each plant species, with testing facilities for each plant. The Indian Council for Agricultural Research must standardize the methodology for evaluating bioactive markers in plants, so that there is no lab-to-lab variation.

Emphasising the importance of data, Acharya Balkrishna, MD, Patanjali Ayurved Ltd., pointed out that the bioactive compound in haldi (turmeric) and ashwagandha is different in different states, and needs a biomarker. He lamented that the Arjun tree takes 30-40 years to grow, but dies when the bark is taken. The forest department suggested that bark could be provided from trees felled for other reasons. Balkrishna said afforestation must be increased in mountainous regions, and mooted proper training of farmers in the cultivation of medicinal plants, with increased geo-fencing and geo-tagging.

The addl. Director-General, Forests, said tissue cultivation could

harness plant material from endangered forest species. But certification of seed source is imperative under WTO provisions, and only Uttar Pradesh has undertaken certification so far. The seed, bark, flowers, roots, all need certification of source, and guarantee of purity (no pesticide). However, he stressed that the Forest Departments need to know how much product is needed by industry and when. The sector being unorganised, poses impediments for industry. Around 20 lakh hectares are cultivated by farmers so far; there are seed banks for 42 species and germ plasm for 20 species, but much remains to be done. E-Charak is documenting all species in the Medicinal Plant Conservation Area.

Global AYUSH Investment & Innovation Summit

The charkha-shaped Mahatma Mandir, Ahmedabad, hosted the three-day investment summit that ended on a promising note with the Ayush sector receiving letters of intent of over Rs 9,000 crore in major categories such as FMCG, Medical Value Travel (MVT) and services, pharmaceuticals, technology & diagnostics, and farmers & agriculture. These are expected to generate around six lakh jobs. The Union Defence Ministry signed MOUs for ayush benefits in hospitals in 37 cantonment areas.

The Union Science and Technology Ministry has proposed joint research and a joint PhD program with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. There are plans to develop a network of AYUSH parks to encourage the promotion, research and manufacturing of AYUSH products across the country. □□

<https://chintan.indiafoundation.in/articles/ayurveda-and-yoga-spearhead-indias-medical-diplomacy/>

Traditional Medicine on Trial

According to WHO 170 out of 194 member states of the organization use traditional medicines but do not necessarily have reliable evidence and data on traditional medicine products and practices. Without that policy building and integration of these medicines into their health systems is not possible. Hence WHO has opened global centre for traditional medicine in India.

According to WHO a traditional medicine is the total sum of the “knowledge, skills, and practices indigenous and different cultures have used over time to maintain health and prevent, diagnose and treat physical and mental illness. Its reach encompasses ancient practices such as acupuncture, ayurvedic medicine and herbal mixtures as well as modern medicines.”

In India these include practices and therapies involving Ayurveda, Siddha, Yoga and others (homeopathy, unani, etc.) that have been part of Indian traditions since ancient times. While Ayurveda and Yoga has spread countrywide, different regions have their own traditional medicine systems.

As on date traditional medicines are not integrated into national health systems and strategies. Nor there are accredited courses and health facilities. It is notable that nearly 40% of approved pharma products are derived from natural substances, such as contraceptive pills. Thus there is a need to rely on biodiversity and sustainable practices. In order to bring traditional medicines into mainstream their efficacy needs to be scientifically tested and validated. For this modern practices such as MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging), artificial intelligence etc. need to be increasingly deployed (these are already being used, though not on a wide scale, due to lack of systematic research) to establish their therapeutic and preventive values. Technology should aid the establishment of credentials of such medicines as also in their adoption and usage far and wide.

During the pandemic leading companies launched hundreds of natural and herbal products. However, post easing of the problem ayurvedic products share has either stagnated or declined. However, according to Research and Informa-



While traditional medicine system is based on our ancient wisdom, practices, and experience, there is a lack of rigorous clinical trials. This issue needs addressing.
Dr. Jaya Kakkar



tion System (RIS) the Ayush market – comprising Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy – is estimated to have expanded to \$20.6 billion in 2021 from around \$18 billion in 2020. People's belief in Ayurveda has increased over the years and the pandemic has helped accelerate it. Initiative like global centre should boost this acceptance across the world since these healing methods can go a long way in mitigating diseases. Many people around the world rely on herbal products for some part of primary healthcare. GCTM can act as an accessible, eco-friendly and interactive facility showcasing global traditions and advancements in traditional medicine.

Much of traditional medicine is based on received knowledge and home remedies. Faith and trans-generational anecdotal – as against scientific – support have been its mainstay. Anyone with persuasive skills has scope for practicing these medicines in an unregulated market. Thus even though the medicine may not be at fault, the practitioner's ill baked knowledge makes the patient and potential users skeptical about their efficacy. The WHO GCTM seeks to change this. It will work on four strategic areas: one, gathering evidence and learning, two, deployment of data and analytics for experimentation and fastertesting; three, keeping in mind the environmental footprints and sustainability; and four, adoption of innovation and technology. Once the traditional medicine becomes evidence based – based on scientific testing – it will be treated at par with modern (aka allopathic) medicine.

The goal of an appropriate health system should not be mere-

ly to cure. Rather, it should work towards maintaining well being and health, prevent disease, and diagnose and treat it in most effective manner. The efficacy of the system needs to be measured in terms of time and cost of treatment, minimization of side effects, etc. Moreover, the health system should have universal access and acceptability. The idea is not to replace 'modern' medicine by traditional one; rather, to optimize the whole health system by integrating traditional medicine, which anyway has a very strong base in India, so as to search for best available solutions. The patient – indeed the whole general population – should have alternative choices for their health needs. Remember while Ayurveda is India born, Unani is a central Asian import, while Homeopathy was developed by a German practitioner, and Siddha has its base largely in south India.

Above all, traditional Indian medicine must meet global standards. This is the primary requirement since there are skeptics galore who associate the traditional medicine system with only quackery and fraud. It is a known fact that even established, large traditional medicine manufacturers escape scrutiny when they make tall claims like cure cancer, heart disease, and many such terminal diseases. Yet it is undeniable that in our country where an average person's access to standard allopathic treatment is limited by both reach and expense, promoting alternative medicine choice which has more widespread access and relatively at a lower cost is an idea that needs extensive support.

Bharatiya Janata Party has come into power with a broad

socio-cultural agenda. This includes reestablishing our ancient glorious part, be it ancient scientific wisdom, vedic math, rich historical traditions, or Yoga. In the same line the BJP government, immediately after coming to power decided to set up Ministry of Ayush in September 2014. While the idea was indeed laudable one must not shut eyes towards problems in promoting efficacious traditional medicine.

Firstly, there are no uniform standards nor effective monitoring mechanism in the area of traditional medicine. Consequently, as we said earlier, fraud and quackery are widespread. This includes the use of harmful steroids and metals in homeopathic and Ayurvedic medicines and products. Even the government has been overzealous in promoting traditional medicine without underlying scientific basis for government protocol sanctioning Ayurvedic and yoga practices, the latest case being endorsement of their use for prevention and cure for asymptomatic and mild covid patients. While it may be true that these medicines may have been effective, the Indian medical association objected to non-availability of any scientific proof. Secondly, the sector is completely unregulated with presence of micro enterprises; everyone relies on traditional texts which have not been put under any kind of scrutiny.

Having said that the latest endeavour of setting up the GCTM, alongwith need to reduce the quack practices, should help in providing the seeker a reliable, low cost, free of side effects alternative on one hand and in freeing the poor patient from the clutches of profiteering multinational drug mafia on the other. □□

US does a lot for India, but India too does a lot for US

Ask not what the United States does for India, ask what India does for the United States. Prime Minister Narendra Modi ought to have paraphrased that famous line from John F. Kennedy during his recent interaction with US President Joe Biden. In media reports of the virtual meeting between the two heads of government and the 2+2 meeting between the defence and foreign ministers of both countries that followed, the focus has largely been on how the United States can and does extend strategic support to India. It is helpful to remind ourselves and the US every now and then that India too has long extended strategic support to the United States.

Too much is made of the merchandise trade deficit of \$23 billion that India enjoys with the United States. Former President Donald Trump and his administration's trade representative made quite a fetish out of quoting it. The US seeks to wipe this out by doubling its defence sales to India from the present level of \$21 billion, at the expense of several rival suppliers, especially Russia.

What the bilateral trade figures do not reveal is the transfer of wealth from India to the US through the export of highly talented Indian migrants. Indian brain power fuels the engines of education, research, innovation, corporate management and the services economy in the United States — all fields that give the US a global edge over its rivals and peers. As recently as in 1990, the total number of Indian migrants to the

US was estimated to be 450,000. By 2020, this was over 2.7 million.

Till the turn of the century economists viewed this migration as a "brain drain". Over the past couple of decades they have come to view the Indian global diaspora as a "brain bank". Whatever form this brain power takes, the fact remains that this Indian talent has contributed positively to all the countries hosting it. This "brain power" is India's investment in the development of those host



What the bilateral trade figures do not reveal is the transfer of wealth from India to the US through the export of talented Indian migrants.
Sanjaya Baru



countries. One need not take a moral or political view of this phenomenon, whether it is good or bad, but one must quantify it and understand in what way India's society and economy have contributed to the development of the countries that are receiving such talent.

In the 1950s, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru invited the Nobel Prize-winning American economist Milton Friedman to study India and offer his advice on its economic development. While Friedman made himself unpopular with Nehru by suggesting that the Planning Commission be wound up and the public sector be privatised, he made one prescient observation that ought to have been taken more seriously. The United States economy grew, Friedman wrote in a 1955 note to Nehru, because it had vast natural resources at its disposal and sucked in labour power from across the world. India has limited natural resources but a vast pool of people. Invest in your people, he suggested, and they will be for India what land and natural resources were for America.

It is one idea that has failed to capture the imagination of successive generations of the Indian political and intellectual leadership. Of course, India has invested in its people and many of them fuel the engine of growth. But compared to the vast pool of people available, the educated and skilled remain a limited set.

Worse, from this pool of talent, a sizeable number migrate to the developed world, mostly to the United States. It is, therefore, time for India to define the two-way relationship in a more balanced

The US-India strategic partnership has often been viewed through the prism of third parties, and they are relevant to a certain extent.

way, quantifying not just what the US does to support India's rise but also what India and Indians do to support America's global dominance.

India certainly needs the United States, not just for the guns, ships and jets that it can sell and the intelligence it can share, but for all the new technologies it can give access too. The United States also needs India, not just as an ally against China and a provider of low-cost defence personnel and services in this part of the world, but as a source of highly talented manpower that can ensure America's global dominance in information technology-enabled businesses.

The US-India strategic partnership has often been viewed through the prism of third parties, and they are relevant to a certain extent. In dealing with the China-Pakistan axis, India has found its relationship with both Russia and the US to be helpful.

However, the US-India partnership also stands on its own legs precisely because it is a two-way street. This fact is not adequately appreciated, indeed generally not recognised, because it has not been

quantified. What exactly has been the contribution of 2.7 million people of Indian origin to sustaining US global power?

Milton Friedman thought that population can do for India what natural resources did for the US. The irony is that the best of Indians are doing for the US what Friedman had hoped they would do for India. Of course, we in India must take full responsibility for this.

The out-migration of talent has both a pull and a push dimension and there is no point blaming individuals. The question to ask is what can more India do to retain its talent so that it can fuel the country's development.

The problem of out-migration of talent has been accentuated in recent years by the shortage of opportunities at home as well as by domestic social and political trends. In my book *India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution* (2021) I show how the "secession of the successful" has accelerated in the past five years. The turn that domestic politics is taking may contribute to a further acceleration of this process.

The beneficiaries will be the countries of the Anglosphere — the United States, Britain Canada, Australia and other English-speaking countries like Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

The government may be able to do very little to prevent this migration, and indeed it is doing a lot to make educated young Indians want to leave the country, but it can at least try and quantify it so that the host countries are aware of India's generous contribution to their global dominance. □□

The writer is an economist, a former newspaper editor, a best-selling author, and former adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

Due Diligence to Organic Farming in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka attempted the complete migration to organic farming in the least lead time. One day the government decided to completely ban chemical fertilizer based farming. The business interest of seed and chemical fertilizer companies were ruined by this one decision of the government of Sri Lanka. The business interest was not only of the Sri Lankan companies. But the business interests of the big companies of the developed countries and of course china.

The political leadership of Sri Lanka had committed in their recent election promises that they will transmit the country to organic farming from harmful chemical-based farming in the next decade. It was an attack on the business interest of the greedy companies who claim to conduct unbiased science-based research to suit their interests at the cost of the health of the general public. But the government deviated from the original plan and executed the decision to go organic in a single step huge long jump. What had to be executed in ten years was executed blindly in one day. It seems to have failed. It's still tough to say that had Sri Lanka avoided this quick jump then its economy, politics and people would have a better future. To blame the switching to organic farming as the only reason is to catch the low hanging fruits. The deep pocket producers of genetically modified seeds and chemical fertilizers have managed to create propaganda that the decision to go organic was too little and too fast. It could not save the economy and politics of Sri Lanka from turbulence. But the other argument is that had Sri Lanka avoided this courageous step to go organic then could it be assured with a certain probability of guarantee that its situation would have been better.

The crisis of Sri Lanka has deep foundations. This foundation of crisis has Chinese roots. The early warning signals were ignored and by the time it was admitted by the government to the people it was too late and the government



As a responsible neighbour of Sri Lanka, we should own the responsibility to bail out Sri Lanka during this crisis with the same spirit as we did with the Covid-19 vaccine.
Alok Singh



had fewer arrows in its quiver. The only visible arrow that the government of the day could offer to its people was organic farming in election speeches and when the situation deteriorated it used its arrow in a haphazard way as opinion-makers believe. One more arrow was lost but no relief, either to the economy or to the people.

The big question is that is it so? We have seen during the Covid vaccination programme, how the trial of a vaccine which consumes years, approximately ten years to recommend for use was approved for emergency use within a year. The nations of the world had limited alternatives and the risk was executed which paid favourably well in subsequent waves of the Covid-19. Our own Bharat Biotech came up with Covaxin within a year's time and it saved us from the politics of the 'Vaccine Nationalism', and vaccine as a tool to arm-twist the foreign and economic policy. We are doing relatively well because we aimed for self-reliance in the Covid-19 vaccine and it gave us strength in our national as well as international endeavours. We had seen how the Bharat Biotech had to face troubles at every stage of trial and the propaganda against our own vaccines. We could successfully manoeuvre ourselves from such politics which reflected in columns and articles and research papers which did not favour Covaxin. The execution of Sri Lanka to go organic in the least lead time is labelled as unplanned, but during emergency situations, many standard protocols are rescheduled to optimise the advantage. It seems Sri Lanka did so.

The problems faced by Sri

The execution of Sri Lanka to go organic in the least lead time is labelled as unplanned, but during emergency situations, many standard protocols are rescheduled to optimise the advantage.

Lanka can be classified as systematic risks and unsystematic risks. The Covid-19 risk is systematic risk and the unprepared people worldwide faced it. Even China suffered a lot, though the fingers of the deliberate or accidental leak are pointed toward the Wuhan lab of China.

This systematic risk created serious troubles for the tourism and hospitality sector. Many island nations feed their population based on the tourism economy. So, Sri Lanka suffered huge earnings in the tourism sector due to Covid-19. Sri Lanka could do nothing to counter this risk.

The unsystematic risks are the choice of the trade agreements and the type of economy in which it decided to place itself. The choice of Sri Lanka to choose a free-market economy with an unprecedented dilution of the roles of regulators and a zero-tariff trade policy is the long term culprit. This free-market economy creed a huge gap between the rich and the poor and by the time they realised it is unsustainable and inequitable it had

already created a web of traps for this island nation. It opened its economy to the world and China saw it as an opportunity to control it. Today, Sri Lanka is the biggest victim of China's debt-trap strategy.

In the middle of such a crisis, Sri Lanka had to make a call. It called to go organic in the farming sector so that it can achieve self-reliance in food and save import bills on fertilizers and artificial seeds. During the initial days of this organic farming decision it was applauded by the caretakers of the climate issue; rational, unbiased and nature-friendly scientists; advocates of sustainable living; and opinion makers who care for climate, nature and future generations.

Every process has a cycle time before the final product takes visible shape. By increasing the resources the output can be increased but the cycle time can't be reduced. The fair opinion is that Organic farming will also consume its own share of cycle time and the sensible world leaders in general and Bharat, in particular, has to create ways for Sri Lanka to survive during this cycle time of going through organic farming process.

We had vaccine diplomacy with the needy nations in general and poor nations of the world in particular. As a responsible neighbour of Sri Lanka, we should own the responsibility to bail out Sri Lanka during this crisis with the same spirit as we did with the Covid-19 vaccine. At no cost the decision of Sri Lanka to go back to fertilizer based farming be encouraged. Serious due diligence is needed. This effort will be good for humanity.

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(Alok Singh is a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Management Indore and is a freelancer academician.)

How consumers can play a key role in making agri-food systems sustainable



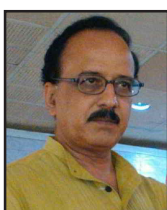
Addressing the Khalsa College at Amritsar the other day, I said the next revolution in agriculture will be consumer driven. A few weeks later, delivering the keynote at a national convention on non-chemical farming under the banner of “Kudrat Utsav” organised by the non-profit Kheti Virasat Mission (KVM) at Chandigarh, my call to the audience, which comprised primarily of urban consumers and practitioners, was to exercise their right in demanding safe and healthy food.

Why I listed the two events is to essentially drive home the point that the

next revolution in agriculture will be largely influenced by the consumers. Unlike the Green Revolution, which increased crop production manifold to meet the challenges of food shortages, the next major transformation in agriculture – let’s call it as an Evergreen Revolution, a term that was first used by Dr M S Swaminathan — will be driven by health and environmentally conscious consumers. The demand for organic food has been growing, and given the increasing realisation of the need for healthy food to boost your immune system, I can foresee an exponential jump in the years to come.

The organic food market in India is projected to grow by a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 20.5 per cent in the next five years, between 2022 and 2027. This is impressive, and given an increased understanding among consumers of the damaging role intensive agriculture plays in climate change, the demand will further grow. The higher the demand for organic food, the higher will be the pressure on farmers to move towards a healthy transformation – from chemical to non-chemical farming systems.

In the years to come, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has in a series of reports warned of the destructive consequences of a temperature rise beyond the permissible limits. Considering that agriculture contributes approximately a third of the Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GNGs) that the world generates, consumers are becoming aware of the devastating consequences of higher emissions. Further, with soil fertility declining to almost zero in intensively farmed regions; and resulting soil erosion expanding the process of desertification, the harmful implications that stare ahead are clearly visible. Add to it the excessive mining of groundwater which is sucking aquifers dry, more so in exhaustively farming regions — like Punjab and Haryana in India — and with chemical pesticides becoming extremely pervasive in environment, an average consumer is



The more the consumers assert, the more the farmers will change. The key to the next revolution in agriculture lies in the hands of consumers.

Devinder Sharma

becoming aware of how the entire food chain has been contaminated.

The development narrative too is changing. The irreversible impacts of climate change – if temperature exceeds 1.5 degrees centigrade – are not only well known, but equally frightening. More droughts and heat waves will ravage the planet. Already studies are pointing to displacement of 700 million people in Africa if the warming is not kept within the prescribed limits. Frequency of cyclones, storms and extreme weather conditions is increasing. Rise in sea water level will wipe out coastal communities in several parts of the world, and many island nations will disappear. Already glaciers are melting at an alarming rate, and weather precipitation is necessitating a shift in habitats. This is expected to bring an additional 350 million people to be faced with water scarcity.

I don't think the consumer is insensitive as well as indifferent to the severe consequences of climate change at home, and they do worry about the possibility of an apocalypse in future if business as usual continues. That is why from building more heat-absorbing concrete jungles, the focus is now shifting to greener cities of the future. From fossil fuel to greener fuel options – like solar and electric power, so much so that many discernible among them are beginning to question even the economic growth model. Chasing the GDP is leading to the destruction of natural resources, and increasing a global movement for degrowth and green growth as a pathway is also building up. People do realise that farming is increasingly vulnerable to the climatic aberrations. But unfortunately, the solutions being

offered remain the same: more aggressive push for industrial agriculture. Despite the dominant economic thinking remaining inclined towards intensive farming systems, citing the possibility of increasing hunger and malnutrition with a transformation towards non-chemical farming systems, consumers can still play a significant role by seeking foods that are cultivated by regenerative agriculture practices that does minimal harm to the environment.

Consumers need to be doubly cautious about their food habits ensuring that it does not lead to more toxic soils, more water being pulled out for crop cultivation, and does not allow for cultivation practices leading to further contamination of the food chain. Already there is a visible shift towards safe food globally, slowly but steadily it is growing in proportion. Instead of large industrial farms, the emphasis has to shift to small scale agriculture which as per numerous research studies is more efficient than big agriculture. A small scale agro-ecological farming method is the crying need of the times. Public policies are increasingly coming under pressure to encourage a transformation towards ecologically safe small scale farming systems.

This is a healthy sign. The fact that consumers are asserting that food has to be healthy, meeting the needs of nutritional security, is indicative of the growing public support for non-chemical agriculture. And the need for healthy nutritious food is driving a change in food habits, and the shift towards nutritious foods like millets, coarse grains, pulses, vegetables and dairy products is evident. Already the

area under millets has expanded, and farmers are getting a better price. Requiring less water, millets can very well fit into a farming system that is climate resilient. Since staple foods - wheat and paddy - will face reduction in yields because of rising temperatures, the demand from consumers should hopefully shift to crops that can fit into the changing climate.

Why I am hoping that consumers will call the shots in the years to come is because with ample food production that the world is saddled with, and despite agribusiness industry creating a fear psychosis, people do realise that there is no evidence of any shortfall in food production. A third of what the world produces every year goes down in the landfills. If food wastage was a country, it would have ranked third in global methane emissions. The challenge therefore is to first reduce the monumental food wastage. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that people are aware they now have the option to freely exercise their food choices.

If the world doesn't transform towards a healthy and ecologically safe farming systems, consumers must take the blame. After all, if they had demanded for instance the food that does not require more use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which definitely adds on to global warming, the farmers would have got the right message. The more the consumers assert, the more the farmers will change. The key to the next revolution in agriculture therefore lies in the hands of consumers. □□

(The author is a noted food policy analyst and an expert on issues related to the agriculture sector. He writes on food, agriculture and hunger)

<https://www.thehindu.com/business/how-consumers-can-play-a-key-role-in-making-agri-food-systems-sustainable-738446>

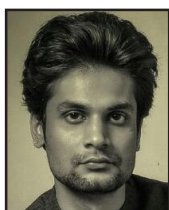
Earth Day: Affirm Conservation as Resistance

Happy Earth Day, fellow earthlings! It's a mystery how spaceship Earth has survived another century, pumped up on fossil fuels, forests burned, water wasted and half the world population living in poverty, without fresh water, air or nutrition. When we hear corporate overlords say, "Great Reset", "Fourth Industrial Revolution", and "corporates for Earth", we must shiver. For it only heralds a new Great Game to privatise nature.

The theme of Earth Day this year is "Invest in our planet". It, too, is in line with the corporate-fuelled agenda. But that's no surprise. Giant multinational corporations and countries in the developed world want us to spend our hard-earned resources to clean up their messes. The developing world faces 9/10th of the world's climate burden, while Wall Street was busy last year, setting up a Natural Asset fund and management companies to profit from climate control. The sustainability reports filed by corporate giants sound lovely, and their commitments to net-zero are being promoted as an ultimate solution. But remember, plastic and aluminium were once the green thing to do too, and look where that got us.

The reality is, green targets are an economy in which every dollar or rupee we spend goes into the pockets of the corporate sector—and the clean-up cost is ours, too. Here is how: Recently, while travelling in Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh, I found a unique agricultural practice still in action. People use agri-chemicals to a limited extent. They still allow their land to rest for six months, restoring soil fertility. But that should not surprise us either: we know that the 50 least developed countries contribute less than 1% to global carbon emissions.

Then I also saw trash, mostly empty packets of packaged food items, all over Himachal Pradesh. Untreated sewage was entering rivers and streams in every town, village and city. When it rains, the residue from quarries, and untreated municipal waste, overflow into the nearest river. In short, no place is safe from corporate-generated filth in India or the world. And who is destroying the natural environment every day except the corporations that own the mines, even our garbage? Agreed, even though the scales vary widely, the developing countries,



*Let us be realistic
as we try to limit
pollution and
global warming.
Then we can hope
the earth will.*

**Indra Shekhar
Singh**



too, must play a role in climate change mitigation. For, the more the earth grows warmer, the more inequalities will rise. Yes, we in India need to leave our rivers, glaciers and remote areas alone to rejuvenate.

Or else, considering the scale at which anthropogenic activities are fuelling environmental disasters, there won't be many natural sites left if collective action to mitigate rising global temperature is ignored. That is why the Kyoto Protocol spoke of "common but differential responsibility" in 1997. And, whatever happened to the \$100 billion promised to the developing world at COP-21 in France? Not even half its target has been reached. Perhaps it is a result of the move away from mitigating and adapting strategies to individual role in environment and climate change. The systemic issues are relegated to the sidelines, since developing nations bear the burden of climate change and need fuel resources to propel their rise out of poverty.

Let us talk about how we can invest in "our earth" in this context. The way ahead is not to appease "industry leaders" because their leadership has landed us in the climate crisis in the first place. Their loyalties are, supposedly, to their shareholders and profit, not the planet. If anything, we should insist corporations fulfil their environmental "conservation" missions by not hurting it more. We must insist that corporations set more ambitious targets to reduce emissions. We need more changes: Nature doesn't charge for water, so why do corporates get to make us pay for a bottle of it? In other words, sure, invest in the planet, but not through Wall Street.

Indeed, the corporate-led

Today, what the planet needs most is a political investment. We have to ensure corporations do not get control over our planet.

model of growth and development has forced us to believe that individuals can achieve a better earth while collective action is disincentivised.

Now on, let us use our money—our government's money, the taxpayers' money, citizen's money—to buy and promote the local economy. We must get our governments to invest time, effort, and money to restore our local environments. Go ahead and plant a tree, dig a pond, eat local produce and meat, but collective action is the only way forward to see change globally. To get governments to disinvest from planet-killing businesses, we need peoples' advocacy campaigns that demand accountability from those who pollute the earth most. We inherit the earth as a commons. So we must disempower corporate tyranny over food, water, and natural resources. This can only be done by promoting local decentralised systems and climate-friendly development models.

The next big investment is into water and seeds. To save water does not mean using less water at homes. It means helping regenerate water while remembering that the developing countries are striv-

ing to cover greater populations with access to clean water. If we want to limit domestic water consumption, we have to plan water waste-free homes and local water projects, not retro-fit them decades later. We have to do collective work for water and energy security. And a crucial aspect of this is keeping water out of private hands.

Today, what the planet needs most is a political investment. We have to ensure corporations do not get control over our planet. We must resist this. One example of resistance would be to have a pollution tax. The Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments impose a "green cess" on polluters, especially those who manufacture plastic and bottle "soft" drinks. The entire clean-up cost of picking up after these industries must also be recovered from those who run polluting factories and generate polluting waste. Corporations that manufacture food items need to use bio-degradable packaging. We cannot afford to contaminate the upper courses of rivers, just like the overwhelming pollution downstream from industry, agriculture, and domestic waste.

We need to invest in taking a technological leap, devising ways to promote green policies for eco-sensitive areas. Agriculture needs to be at the forefront of this policy. Sustainable agriculture is the way to rejuvenate damaged land and water systems. We need to join with the earth. If not, the capitalist industrial empire will drive us all into extinction, killing humanity even before the planet dies. □□

The author is an independent agri-policy analyst and writer and former director, policy and outreach at NSAI. The views are personal.

<https://www.newsclick.in/Earth-Day-Affirm-Conservation-Resistance>

Glyphosate and Roundup: All roads lead to cancer



Glyphosate and Roundup lead to changes in gene regulatory microRNAs (miR--NAs or miRs) linked with cancer, newly published data show. The analysis, of a type known as small RNA profiling, was conducted in liver tissue from rats exposed to glyphosate and Roundup MON 52276, an EU-approved formulation, over 90 days.

In the new results, Roundup MON 52276 was found to reduce the levels of miR-22 and miR-17, whereas glyphosate decreased the level of miR-30 and increased the amount of miR-10. These changes in miR-

NAs are important because they are known to alter the expression of crucial cell growth regulator genes, which can lead to the development of cancer.

A gene function that is central to multiple cellular processes, p53, is a particular target of these miRNAs. The miRNA changes can lead to alterations in p53 gene expression, as has been found in multiple types of cancer in humans.

The link between the changes in miRNAs and p53 gene expression is consistent with the findings within the same study showing gene expression changes in Roundup- and glyphosate-exposed rats. The gene expression changes strongly imply a p53 pathway DNA damage response. DNA damage is a major risk factor for cancer development.

Furthermore, increases in miR-10 have been found in other studies to be associated with leukemia, a blood cancer. The increase in mir-10 caused by glyphosate exposure in the experimental animals may provide one mechanism by which users of Roundup have succumbed to another blood cancer, known as non-Hodgkin lymphoma. These results could strengthen the legal cases of the cancer sufferers in the US who are suing Bayer/Monsanto because they believe that exposure to Roundup caused their disease. Three such cases have already been decided in favour of the plaintiffs.

Study lead Dr Michael Antoniou of King's College London said, "The new data showing changes in miRNA patterns add yet more evidence to the cancer-causing potential of glyphosate and Roundup. What is more, our results show that it is not just Roundup, which is a mixture of glyphosate with various additives, that has carcinogenic potential, but also glyphosate alone."

Previously reported findings

The new data confirm and build on previously reported findings that were published as a pre-print in April 2021, which GMWatch reported on. The study with the additional findings has now passed peer review and is published in the prestigious journal, Toxicological Sciences.

The increase in mir-10 caused by glyphosate exposure in the experimental animals may provide one mechanism by which users of Roundup have succumbed to another blood cancer, known as non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

Swadeshi Samvad

The pre-print version of the study had reported that glyphosate and glyphosate-based herbicides such as Roundup activate mechanisms involved in cancer development, including DNA damage – and these effects occur at doses assumed by regulators to have no adverse effects. The data suggest that the DNA damage was caused by oxidative stress, a destructive imbalance in the body that can cause a long list of diseases. Oxidative stress is the likely cause of the damage seen to the liver, leading to an inflammatory (immune type) response, which in turn can cause DNA damage.

Crucially, the study found that the isolated active ingredient of Roundup – glyphosate – damaged DNA. This finding, according to the EU's pesticide law, should result in a ban on glyphosate and all its formulations.

All these findings are carried over into the peer-reviewed version of the study.

How the study was done

The study builds on the findings of a previous one by the same authors. In the previous study, the researchers had compared the effects in rats of MON 52276 with those of its "active ingredient", glyphosate, tested alone. The findings showed that glyphosate and Roundup herbicide, given at doses that regulators say are safe, resulted in the animals suffering gut microbiome disturbances and oxidative stress, with indications that the liver was affected and possibly damaged.

In the current followup study, the researchers analysed the liver tissue from the same rats to see if damage had indeed occurred.

The researchers carried out some of the standard tests that regulators require the pesticide industry to conduct to gain market authorisation for their products – namely blood biochemistry and kidney and liver histopathology (microscopic examination of tissue).

They also carried out in-depth tests (molecular profiling) that are not demanded by regulators or typically carried out by the industry. One type of test looked for adverse effects at a profound molecular level of biological functioning through analysis of gene expression (transcriptomics) and epigenetics (DNA methylation) in the liver and kidneys. Another type of test, using specialised genetically engineered cell lines, was intended to highlight changes in function linked with cancer formation.

In addition, the researchers carried out tests that can detect direct damage to DNA.

Roundup causes fatty liver disease – confirmed

The standard tests, histopathology and blood biochemistry analysis, found adverse effects from the Roundup treatment, namely a dose-dependent and statistically significant increase in fatty liver disease and liver cell death.

The finding of fatty liver disease from exposure to the MON 52276 formulation of Roundup confirmed the same researchers' previous observation that an ultra-low dose of another Roundup formulation, Roundup Grand Travaux Plus, administered to the same strain of Sprague-Dawley rats over a 2-year period, caused non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

An increase in liver and kid-

ney lesions was also detected in animals treated with glyphosate, although this did not reach statistical significance. However, the authors commented that an experiment of longer duration using more animals may have resulted in statistical significance.

Non-standard tests most revealing

Worryingly for public health, it was the non-standard molecular profiling tests that are not required by pesticide regulators that were most revealing.

First, Roundup was found to alter the expression of 96 genes in the liver specifically linked to DNA damage and oxidative stress, as well as disruption of circadian rhythms or "body clocks". The most affected genes in liver also had their expression similarly altered in kidneys. Crucially, a core set of genes whose expression was altered by Roundup was similarly changed in the glyphosate-treated animals. This strongly suggests that the key changes in gene function reflective of oxidative stress and DNA damage was due to glyphosate and not the additional substances (adjuvants) present in the Roundup formulation.

Second, direct DNA damage to the liver was found to increase with glyphosate exposure.

These findings potentially constitute a bombshell that could end the authorisation of glyphosate in the EU. That's because the EU pesticide regulation (1107/2009) has what's known as hazard-based cut-off criteria. This means that if a pesticide active ingredient is shown to cause a certain type of harm to health at whatever dose, it must be banned. One of the

named types of harm is damage to DNA. The discovery that glyphosate alone damages DNA in a living animal should, if regulators follow the law, result in a ban on the chemical.

Third, both glyphosate and Roundup were found to cause epigenetic changes known as DNA methylation. Epigenetics describes layers of molecular structures associated with DNA that control the underlying function of genes. The defining feature of epigenetic changes is that they can alter how genes work but do not involve changes to the actual DNA sequence. These types of changes were found at over 5,000 genomic sites for glyphosate and over 4,000 for Roundup. This is a concern because such alterations are typically found at high frequency in cancer tissues.

All findings lead to same conclusion

The researchers performed further laboratory tests in mouse cell lines, which are designed to highlight effects that can lead to cancer formation. Glyphosate and three Roundup formulations were assessed in these tester cell lines. It was found that two formulations of Roundup herbicide, but not glyphosate, activated oxidative stress and misfolded protein responses, both clear markers of carcinogenicity.

Commenting on the totality of the data, Dr Antoniou said, "No matter what molecular measurements we undertook, they all led to the same conclusion: that is, both glyphosate and Roundup are potential carcinogens."

Other studies, including the industry ones submitted to support regulatory approval of glyphosate, have also found that glyphosate

causes cancer in experimental animals. Based on studies in animals and humans, as well as mechanistic data, in 2015 the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified glyphosate as a probable human carcinogen.

Other implications of the new study

1. Ending animal testing is not yet feasible: Interestingly, in the new study, glyphosate was shown to damage DNA in living animals but not in the cell culture system. This shows that in vitro lab tests using isolated cells cannot fully substitute for evaluations in a living animal because certain effects will be missed. This is because animals (including humans) are whole organisms whose complexity cannot be replicated in a flask, petri dish, or test tube. While many people (GMWatch included) would like to see an end to animal testing, as long as pesticides and other chemicals are allowed to be released into the environment, such a move would put public health at risk.

2. Roundup is more toxic than glyphosate: In summary, in general Roundup was found to be more toxic than glyphosate, confirming and building on previous observations. However, taken together, the results from the various assays conducted show that both glyphosate and Roundup herbicides activate mechanisms involved in cancer development, causing gene expression changes reflecting oxidative stress and DNA damage. Also, glyphosate alone was clearly able to induce DNA damage.

These findings directly challenge the global regulatory practice of only assessing the isolated declared active ingredient (glyphosate)

and not the complete commercial formulations (Roundup) as sold and used.

The study further highlights the power of in-depth molecular profiling "omics" methods to detect changes that are missed by relying solely on conventional biochemical and histopathological measurements conducted in standardised industry tests on pesticide active ingredients. The study paves the way for future investigations by identifying gene expression changes and altered DNA methylation sites, which can serve as biomarkers and potential predictors of negative health outcomes resulting from exposure to glyphosate-based herbicides.

3. Results could allow survey of human population for glyphosate herbicide exposure: Commenting on the implications of the results for human exposure monitoring, study lead Dr Michael Antoniou said, "The biomarkers we identified (such as the miRNA and gene expression changes) can be tested for in people, but we don't know if this particular pattern of biomarkers is unique to glyphosate-based herbicide exposure. Thus the biomarkers would need to be correlated with a history of exposure to glyphosate-based herbicides and measurements of glyphosate in urine.

"If high levels of glyphosate were found in the urine, and this correlated with the biomarkers identified in the new study and the person's history of glyphosate herbicide exposure, this would indicate that exposure to glyphosate-based herbicides might be responsible for any health effects that are both indicated by our findings and found in the person. These find-

ings should be tested first by investigations of herbicide applicators, as their exposure can be high and details of the particular herbicides used are often recorded, which would enable clearer results to be obtained."

4. "Safe" and "no effect" doses were shown to be harmful: In the 90-day rat feeding study, different groups of animals were fed three different doses of glyphosate and the glyphosate-equivalent dose of Roundup MON 52276. The lowest dose was the concentration that regulators assume to be safe to ingest on a daily basis over a lifetime (the EU acceptable daily intake or ADI: 0.5 mg per kg of bodyweight per day). The middle dose was the dose that EU regulators concluded had no observable adverse effect (the "no observable adverse effect" level or NOAEL) in industry-sponsored rat feeding

studies (50 mg per kg of bodyweight per day). The highest dose was 175 mg, the dose that US regulators concluded had no observable adverse effect.

Adverse effects were found from Roundup exposure at all dose levels in a dose-dependent fashion. These findings show that the glyphosate ADI for the EU – and that of the USA, which is even higher – is not safe to ingest. Likewise, it shows that the EU and US regulators were only able to conclude that glyphosate had "no observable adverse effect" at the levels mentioned above because the tests that they require industry to carry out are insufficiently sensitive.

Study supports plaintiffs in Roundup-cancer litigation

Summarising the implications of the study for the Roundup-cancer litigation in the US, Dr Antoni-

ou said, "Our results are the first to simultaneously show glyphosate and Roundup toxicity in a whole mammalian animal model system and provide a mechanism – oxidative stress – by which DNA damage has been observed in other systems, such as mammalian tissue culture cells.

"These findings show that glyphosate and Roundup score positive in various tests of carcinogenicity – transcriptome/epigenome/miRNA changes, oxidative stress, protein misfolding, and DNA damage – in a living animal (rat) that is accepted as a surrogate for human health effects. In my view, this strengthens the argument that exposure to Roundup herbicides can lead to the type of cancer suffered by the plaintiffs in many of the court cases – non-Hodgkin lymphoma." □□

Courtesy: <https://gmwatch.org/en/106-news/latest-news/19980>

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Overview: Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)

ONDC launched by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) of the Union Commerce Ministry is an initiative aimed to promote open networks for all aspects of the exchange of goods and services over digital or electronic networks. According to a strategy paper by ONDC published in January, there needs to be a paradigm shift from an operator-driven monolithic platform-centric model to a facilitator-driven, interoperable decentralized network. The idea of an ONDC first came up in 2020 in order to standardise and streamline the country's e-commerce industry. ONDC is based on open-sourced methodology, using open specifications and open network protocols independent of any specific platform. Govt claims that as UPI is to the digital payment domain, ONDC is to e-commerce in Bharat.

The DPIIT appointed an advisory committee for its ONDC project. ONDC has Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, former McKinsey Bharat head Adil Zainulbhai and National Health Authority CEO R S Sharma as advisors. The task of implementing the project has been given to the Quality Council of India (QCI), which establishes and operates the National Accreditation Structure for conformity assessment bodies and provides accreditation in education, health and quality promotion. The council aims at promoting open networks developed on open-sourced methods, leveraging open specifications and open network protocols that are independent of any specific platform. This project eases the operational aspects of running an e-commerce business. For instance, onboarding of sellers, vendor discovery, price discovery and product cataloguing can be made open source. The format will be similar to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) model. Once mandated, sellers will be onboarded through open networks and



The project aims to curb digital monopoly by creating a platform that can be utilised by all online retailers. It is going to go global.
Vinod Johri



marketplaces such as Amazon, Flipkart will also be asked to register on the ONDC platform.

The project aims to curb digital monopoly by creating a platform that can be utilised by all online retailers. It is going to go global. The government's intention is not to get into business but create standards through the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) that it expects will be adopted by the global e-commerce ecosystem.

ONDC is expected to digitise the entire value chain, standardise operations, promote inclusion of suppliers, derive efficiencies in logistics and enhance value for consumers. When a project is made open-source, it is available for free for others to use and redistribute. Consumers can log in and search for products or services and based on their location they will be able to access a list of sellers, along with product details and price. The platform will support payment gateways and will also offer delivery and logistics services. Dynamic pricing, inventory management and optimisation of delivery cost are the three important things in ONDC which will help reduce the cost of doing business for everybody, including retailers.

On the platform, eSamudaay, ERP player Gofrugal, digital business platform for enterprise business Digiit, and digital marketing outfit Growth Falcon, will work with sellers on the app, while Paytm will be on the buyers' side.

About 20 entities have contributed a total of Rs 255 crore into the ONDC equity. These include NPCI and Punjab National Bank (Rs 25 crore each); Kotak Mahindra Bank (Rs 20 crore); Bank

of Baroda, NSDL eGovernance and National Stock Exchange (Rs. 15 crore each); and BSE, State Bank of India, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank (Rs 10 crore each).

Initially it was launched in five cities - Delhi NCR, Bengaluru, Bhopal, Shillong and Coimbatore on 29th April 2022. It is to be noted that the launch of the platform comes after Competition Commission of India (CCI) searched domestic sellers of Amazon and some of Walmart's Flipkart following accusations of competition law violations.

The government plans to roll out ONDC for the public in 100 Indian cities by Diwali to provide millions of kirana stores and consumers an alternative to multinational platforms such as Amazon and Flipkart.

The two large multinational players Amazon and Flipcart controlled more than half of the country's e-commerce trade, limiting access to the market, giving preferential treatment to some sellers and squeezing supplier margins. The two global giants poured a combined \$24 billion into Bharat and captured 80% of the online retail market with aggressive discounts and promotion of preferred sellers.

With ONDC, the government aims to help smaller businesses and reduce the domination of giants such as Amazon and Walmart-Flipkart. The exploitation of the e-commerce business has reached to an extent that lakhs of shops have been forced to close by unethical business practices of e-tailers in Bharat. Our country has a fast-growing \$1 trillion retail market, but the market is fragmented. Currently, there are over 4,000 small and big e-commerce

companies in India, 500 logistics companies to deliver goods, and more than 20,000 entities including travel and hotels that provide services through e-commerce.

Amazon India said that they were closely engaged with the ONDC team to better understand the proposed model and remained committed to the government's vision of digitizing kiranas, local stores and creating opportunities for businesses across Bharat by simplifying technology adoption to help local stores and businesses contribute to Bharat becoming a \$5 trillion economy. Amazon says that they are closely engaging with the ONDC team to better understand the proposed model and evaluate the role Amazon can play to better serve Indian customers and sellers.

In the last quarter of 2020, the e-commerce order volume in our country increased by 36 per cent and the largest beneficiaries were the personal care, beauty and wellness segments, says IBEF report. The Bhartiya e-commerce market is expected to grow to USD 200 billion by 2026. According to a 2021 report by Bain & Company, India is home to the world's fourth largest retail market in the world, pegged at around \$810 Billion. An Inc42 report said that the addressable ecommerce market in the country is expected to reach the \$200 Bn mark by 2026. ONDC will surely boost swadeshi industries, entrepreneurship and generate employment with growth in FMCG sector by allowing level playing field to even medium and marginal industries scattered all over the country. □□

Vinod Johri: Sah Vichar Vibhag Pramukh, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Delhi Prant

Mewar as the Locus of Guhila State (Part-I)



The Guhila lineages had appeared and dominated a large part of Rajasthan during the Early Medieval period. However, the trajectory of History proves that the Guhilas of Mewar (Southern Rajasthan) successfully carved out a full fledged state in Mewar between the tenth and thirteenth century.
Prof. Nandini Kapur Sinha

The Guhilas of Chatsu initially started their political career in the area of Tonk in the seventh century. They seem to have extended their power up to the area of Chatsu near Jaipur by the tenth century. Their growing territorial expanse and political power is evident from prestigious claims made in the Chatsu inscription of Guhila ruler Bäläditya (tenth century). They laid claims to the status of Brahmaksatrānvita and to the lineage of Guhilavamsa. Baladitya took pride in his overlords, the Gurjara Pratihâras who controlled eastern and southern Rajasthan till the tenth century. Yet their subordinate political status as allies of the Pratihâras was no deterrent to their prestigious social linkages. They consolidated their power in eastern Rajasthan through matrimonial alliances with contemporary Paramâra and Cahamana chiefly families. However, it is important that no record of this Guhila family appears beyond the tenth century. It seems that the Guhilas of Chatsu had been integrated into the growing kingdom of the Cāhamânas of Sâkambhari who held major parts of eastern Rajasthan by the late tenth century.

The Guhilas of Unstrā

Memorial Stone Inscriptions of 1179-80 and of 1190 at an ancient Jain temple at Unstrā suggest the existence of a pocket of Guhila power in this arid tract of Marwar. The inscriptions record the deaths of Rânā Tihunapala' and Rânā Motiœvara, both of the Guhilautra (Guhila) lineage. The Inscription of 1179-80 also records that Rânā Tihunapâla's wives, Pālhanadevi (of the Bodana lineage) and Mâtâdevi, became satis." Rânâ Motiûvara's wife, Raji of the Mohili lineage, also became a sati."

The title of râna and the limited territorial control of the Guhila chiefs of Unstrā suggest that they served in the capacity of subordinate allies and probably died fighting for the cause of an overlord." The overlord could be a Nâdol Cahamâna ruler as an inscription of King Samanta Simhadeva of 1202 is found at a nearby site at Bali, Bamnera. The presence of Bodana and Mohili Rajputs also suggests that Unstrā was a part of the Cahamâna state of Nadol as Bodana and Mohili are the two subdivisions of the Cahamâna clan. Unlike the contemporary Nâgdâ Ahada Guhilas, the Guhila ranäs of Unstrā made no claim to exalted origin. They simply referred to themselves as Guhila." This may have been in keeping with their subordinate status.

The Guhilas of Bagodia

A Bâgodia Tirthamba Inscription of 1054 points to the existence of chiefly Guhila families at Bagodia, near Jodhpur (Marwar). It is also a memorial stone inscription: it refers to the death of one Dhalavana, son of Alaja Vichari, a Guhilaputra. Its recording of the construction of a devali(temple), further suggests the association of the Guhilas with this area.

The Guhilas of Nadol

A Guhila base of power at Nadûladâgikâ, Nâdol (Pali district) is evident from the Jadvaji Jain Temple Inscription of the Reign of Nadol Cāhamana Ruler,

The Guhilas of Nāgda-Ahada not only consolidated their power in their base region but also territorially integrated the central part of the Mewar hills and possibly touched the northern Mahi basin.

Maharajaputra Rayapāladeva (1137-8) and from the Adinath Temple Inscriptions of the same Guhila family. Both inscriptions record grants of grains, shares from oil-mills, incense, flowers, etc., by Thakkura Rajadeva, son of Udhārana of the Guhila lineage.” The donations were granted from Nadūladāgikā. In addition, the grants included parts of the duties levied on pack oxen going to and from Nadūladāgikā. Thakkura Rajadeva is described as ‘holding Nadūladāgikā.’” Both these charters suggest the position of the Guhila family as subordinates of the Cahamānas of Nadol.

The Guhilas of Mangrol

The Sobhadi Vāo Stone Inscription of 1146 takes us to a Guhila centre of power outside Rajasthan: Māngrol, in Saurashtra. The genealogical list in the inscription eulogises Guhila Sahajiga’s sons as protectors (military officials) of Saurashtra. In the same genealogical line, the contemporary Guhila Mūlaka bears the title of naya-ka (chief) of Saurashtra.

The progenitor of the family, Ūri Sāhāra is simply referred to as a Sri Guhila. Thus the Guhilas of Māngrol seem to have been integrated into Caulukyan polity of Gujarat through a system of distribution of roles and services evident in such administrative titles as naya-ka of Saurashtra. However, the absence of any other claim indicates that the Guhilas of Māngrol enjoyed territorial and political power only within Saurashtra. The limited political power is also evident from the political ranking of Guhila Mūlaka in the Thakkura category.”

The Guhilas of Nagda-Ahada and state formation in Mewar, Tenth-Thirteenth centuries

It was the Guhila family of Nagda-Ahada which appears to be directly connected with the rise of a state. It is with the history of this family that we shall be concerned now. The imperial Pratihāras held their sway over southern Rajasthan in the ninth century but their continuous military campaigns kept Pratihāra Bhoja 1 (836-92) occupied in the north, with Devapala of Gauda in the east, and with the Rāstrakūtas of Deccan for most of his reign.” There was no direct annexation of southern Rajasthan by the Pratihāras in the period. Like their contemporary neighbours, the Nāgda-Āhada Guhilas are likely to have acknowledged Pratihāra supremacy over northern India. But such acknowledgement must have been temporary in their case as is apparent from the decline of the Pratihāra power in southern Rajasthan by the mid-tenth century. The presence of Pratihāra representatives at the strategic fortress of Chittaur (as is evident from the Sirur

inscription of the time of Rāstrakūta Amoghavarsha of 866 and Karhad Plates of Krsna II of 959) could not therefore, effectively interrupt the political career of the Nāgda-Ahada Guhilas.

The Guhilas of Nāgda-Ahada not only consolidated their power in their base region but also territorially integrated the central part of the Mewar hills and possibly touched the northern Mahi basin. For this, we have a circumstantial evidence: the total disappearance of the Guhila house of Kīpkindhā after the eighth century. The Nāgdā-Ahada house might have expanded southwards at the expense of the Kīpkindha Guhilas. It is equally significant to note that, of all the Guhilas of southern Rajasthan, it is only the Guhila house of Nagda-Ahada which figures as political subordinates of the Pratihāras in Mewar along with a small ruling family of the Cāhamānas at Pratapgarh in district Chittaurgarh bordering Mandasaur (upper Banas plain) in tenth century. There is no trace of the Guhilas of Dhavagartā or those of Kīkindhā in Pratapgarh Inscription (942-6), the only epigraphical record from Mewar dating to the reign of Pratihāra Mahendrapala II. This extension of Nāgdā-Ahada Guhila territory was achieved through military superiority. In fact, grants made by Bhartṛpatta II at Pratapgarh indicate that the Nāgdā-Ahada Guhilas held some territorial claim in the southern part (Pratapgarh) of the upper Banas plain before 950. The title of mahārājādhirāja for Guhila Bhartṛpatta (II) in the Pratapgarh records (as against the title of bhupo or mahāsāmantas for the Cahamānas” of Pratapgarh) is significant in this respect. □□

SJM Hails ED's Action Against Amway India



Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) has welcomed the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) action against Amway India Enterprises Private Limited, a company accused of running a multi-level marketing scam, and has demanded a probe by the central investigative agencies against all such institutions or companies which are working to "rob innocent people" by luring them with more income.

The forum has also demanded strict action against the culprits of such cases.

While welcoming ED's action against Amway for "running a pyramid fraud schemes under the guise of Direct Selling Multi-Level Marketing Network", SJM, issued a statement saying that there is a need to create a regulatory framework for such Multi-level marketing (MLM) companies to strongly prevent fraudulent practices.

SJM claimed that there are several more MLM companies which have been selling their products at exorbitant prices by "looting innocent citizens" and by "luring them to earn handsome incomes" in India. "When those in the net of these companies start luring their friends and acquaintances, the chain starts," SJM added.

SJM, in the statement, cited a report published by the Federal Trade Commission that studied the business models of 350 MLM companies, saying that 99 per cent of people involved in MLM businesses lose money.

"The business model may be there, but for the gullible, it is causing a definite loss rather than an income opportunity," the statement read.

On April 18, the ED attached assets worth Rs 757.77 crore belonging to Amway.

The attached properties include land and factory building of Amway at Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu, Plant and Machineries, vehicles, bank accounts, and fixed deposits, said the agency, in a statement.

The attached properties include Rs 411.83 crore immovable assets and bank balances of Rs 345.94 crore from 36 different accounts belonging to Amway.

A money-laundering investigation by the ED revealed that Amway is running a pyramid fraud in the guise of direct selling multi-level marketing network.

"It is observed that the prices of most of the products offered by the company are exorbitant as compared to the alternative popular products of reputed manufacturers available in the open market," said the ED.

The federal agency accused that the common gullible public is induced to join as members of the company and purchase products at exorbitant prices and are thus losing their hard-earned money.

"The new members are not buying the products to use them but to become rich by becoming members as showcased by the upline members. Reality is that the commissions received by the upline members contribute enormously to the hike of prices of the products," said the ED.

It is observed that the company has collected an amount of Rs 27,562 crore from its business operations from 2002-03 to 2021-22. Out of this, the company has paid a commission of Rs 7588 Crore to its distributors and members in India and in the USA during Financial Year 2002-2003 to 2020-21.

"The entire focus of the company is about propagating how members can become rich by becoming members. There is no focus on the products. Products are used to masquerade this MLM Pyramid fraud as a direct selling company," said the ED.

Amway has brought Rs 21.39 crores as share capital in India in 1996-97 till Financial Year 2020-21, said the ED, it added, "the company has remitted the huge amount of Rs 2,859.10 crore in the name of dividend, royalty and other payments to their investors and parent entities".

Britt Worldwide India Private Limited and Network Twenty One Private Limited also played a major role in promoting the pyramid scheme of Amway by conducting seminars for joining members under the guise of sale of goods by the enrolment of members in the chain system, said the Central agency."

The promoters are conducting mega conven-

tions and flaunted their lavish lifestyle and used social media to lure gullible investors,” the ED added.

<https://www.latestly.com/agency-news/india-news-swadeshi-jagran-manch-bails-eds-action-against-amway-india-3628839.html>

India Warns Rules Still Apply to an Elon Musk-Owned Twitter



India has warned Elon Musk that it will continue to demand checks on users and content when the Tesla billionaire takes over Twitter.

A change in ownership would make no difference, Rajeev Chandrasekhar, India’s junior minister for electronics and technology said, when asked about Musk’s promise to uphold free speech.

“Our safety and trust expectations in law and rules require all intermediaries to do due diligence about its users and content to qualify to be an intermediary,” he said.

Indian government officials said last year social media platforms may no longer be eligible to seek liability exemptions as intermediaries or the hosts of user content if they failed to comply with local information and technology laws.

Laws that took effect last year make social media firms more accountable to requests for swift removal of posts and require them to give details of the originators of messages. The companies must also have mechanisms for addressing grievances.

The warning on Twitter comes as Musk faces continued obstacles in selling Tesla cars in India.

Nitin Gadkari, India’s transport minister, said on Tuesday that Tesla was welcome to set up shop in the country although “making in China and selling here is not a good proposition”.

Some opposition to Tesla comes from an Indian nationalist group close to the ruling party headed by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Swadeshi Jagran Manch said it was opposed to Tesla getting tariff cuts.

“We want to promote our own domestic industry,” SJM said. “Our automobile industry can now compete and is doing well.”

<https://www.asiafinancial.com/india-warns-rules-still-apply-to-an-elon-musk-owned-twitter>

Tesla loses \$126 billion in value amid Musk Twitter deal funding concern

Tesla Inc lost \$126 billion in value on Tuesday amid investor concerns that Chief Executive Elon Musk may have to sell shares to fund his \$21 billion equity contribution to his \$44 billion buyout of Twitter Inc.

Tesla is not involved in the Twitter deal, yet its shares have been targeted by speculators after Musk declined to disclose publicly where his cash for the acquisition is coming from. The 12.2% drop in Tesla’s shares on Tuesday equated to a \$21 billion drop in the value of his Tesla stake, the same as the \$21 billion in cash he committed to the Twitter deal.

Wedbush Securities analyst Daniel Ives said that worries about upcoming stock sales by Musk and the possibility that he is becoming distracted by Twitter weighed on Tesla shares. “This (is) causing a bear festival on the name,” he said.

Tesla did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

To be sure, Tesla’s share plunge came against a challenging backdrop for many technology-related stocks. The Nasdaq closed at its lowest level since December 2020 on Tuesday, as investors worried about slowing global growth and more aggressive rate hikes from the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Twitter’s shares also slid on Tuesday, falling 3.9% to close at \$49.68 even though Musk agreed to buy it on Monday for \$54.20 per share in cash. The widening spread reflects investor concern that the precipi-



tous decline in Tesla's shares, from which Musk derives the majority of his \$239 billion fortune, could lead the world's richest person to have second thoughts about the Twitter deal.

"If Tesla's share price continues to remain in free-fall that will jeopardize his financing," said OANDA senior market analyst Ed Moya.

As part of the Tesla deal, Musk also took out a \$12.5 billion margin loan tied to his Tesla stock. He had already borrowed against about half of his Tesla shares.

University of Maryland professor David Kirsh, whose research focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship, said investors started to worry about a "cascade of margin calls" on Musk's loans.

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/stocks/news/tesla-loses-126-billion-in-value-amid-musk-twitter-deal-funding-concern/articleshow/91113200.cms?from=mdr>

CCI raids top sellers of Amazon, other retailers



Officials from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) searched the offices of some of the country's largest online sellers including the Amazon-owned Cloudtail as well as Appario Retail, a joint venture entity between the American online giant and the Patni group, multiple people aware of the matter told ET. The antitrust regulator also visited some of the alpha sellers of Walmart-owned Flipkart and social commerce major Meesho, they said.

The raids were in relation to complaints about the anticompetitive measures being adopted by these sellers that move large order volumes for the giant ecommerce companies.

"CCI is probing allegations of all sellers not receiving equal treatment from ecommerce platforms and that (online marketplaces) enter into vertical agreements with select sellers," according to people aware

of the matter.

Offline traders and small online sellers have long complained about these issues to the government and the regulator.

Legal experts are of the view that raids are the first instance where CCI is probing a case involving 'vertical agreements'.

Vertical agreements are those where a large player (in this case, an ecommerce company) enters into exclusive deals with select vendors giving them preference over the other.

Earlier, the competition watchdog has investigated allegations relating to abuse of market position or that of cartels.

"This is the first search and seizure which has happened in relation to a vertical agreement falling under section 3(4) of the Act," said GR Bhatia, head of competition law, L&L partners.

Earlier in 2020, CCI had begun investigations into allegations of antitrust practices at both Amazon India and Flipkart, the country's largest online marketplaces. This was in response to strident complaints from offline retail traders, who have accused the two ecommerce giants of fostering close relations with so-called 'alpha sellers' that are responsible for a significant chunk of deliveries on these platforms.

People briefed on the matter said the probe conducted by CCI officials on Thursday was across ecommerce firms but Appario Retail and Cloudtail are the two biggest entities in which the American ecommerce giant Amazon directly owns a stake.

Amazon India, Cloudtail, Appario Retail, and Flipkart did not reply to ET's email queries on the development. A spokesperson for Meesho said the company has not received any communication from CCI. "We operate a pure play marketplace as required under the FDI ecommerce regulations in India."

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), which has been complaining against foreign retailers like Amazon and Walmart-owned Flipkart, said the raids were 'much awaited' and a welcome step from the CCI which will "vindicate the substance of various complaints made by the CAIT". Praveen Khandwal, secretary general of CAIT, said, "Since the past three years, the CAIT has been raising strong objections against malpractices of Amazon and Flipkart and filed complaints with CCI beside strongly fighting delaying tactics of Amazon and Flipkart in various courts as well".

Cloudtail — which is owned by Prione Business Services, a joint venture between Infosys founder NR Narayana Murthy-backed Catamaran Ventures and Amazon - - has played a critical role in Amazon's early success in India. Appario Retail, which is a subsidiary of Frontizo Business Services — a JV between Amazon and the Patni group, has also emerged as one of the largest sellers on the platform. CAIT added in its statement that Murthy's role in Cloudtail should be probed too.

The Jeff Bezos-led Amazon is now buying 100% stake in Cloudtail, and the deal has been cleared by CCI.

[https://m.economictimes.com/tech/technology/cci-conducts-raids-at-amazons-top-sellers-cloudtail-appario/articleshow/91143910.cms/](https://m.economictimes.com/tech/technology/cci-conducts-raids-at-amazons-top-sellers-cloudtail-appario/articleshow/91143910.cms)

70% Indians favour 'warning sign' on packaged food, 8% say no sign needed: survey

India has witnessed a significant rise in junk-food — especially, packaged and processed food over the last two decades — leading to an adverse effect on public health as most of these foods contain high amounts of sugar or salt and bad fat ingredients that results in increased obesity as well as conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

LocalCircles, after taking cognizance of such issues and conducting a survey with over 11,000 respondents in 382 districts of India, found out that seven out of 10 Indians are in favour of a “red warning sign” on packaged food containing high fat, sugar, and salt.

LocalCircles, in its report, also stated, “nearly 5.8 million people in India die from NCDs every year out of total deaths of about nine million.” Interestingly, according to the World Obesity Federation's prediction more than 27 million children in India may suffer from obesity by 2030.

The report further added that “supermarkets in India, as well as e-commerce platforms, are selling hundreds of varieties of packaged food products. A pack of fruit juice, per se, typically has up to 37 teaspoons of more sugar in a litre than even carbonated drinks, according to a study.”

Interestingly, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has already proposed a plan to introduce Health Star Rating (HSR) for packaged food products, which would rate foods on a five-star scale based on factors such as energy, saturated fat, sodium, total sugar, and healthier aspects



such as protein and natural ingredients.

The survey also makes it clear that only one in two Indians surveyed support a star rating system proposed by FSSAI, while eight per cent claimed that “none of the above is needed, packaged food products must continue to be sold without any warnings or signs.” On the other hand, 39 per cent of respondents have also said that “there should be a green or orange sign on healthy products” in addition to the red sign.

Despite the criticism from consumer activist groups and food experts, FSSAI has decided to go ahead with a new star rating system for packaged foods and beverages. Consumer activist groups are concerned that such a system can be easily manipulated by the industry, compromising public health and have also written a warning letter to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

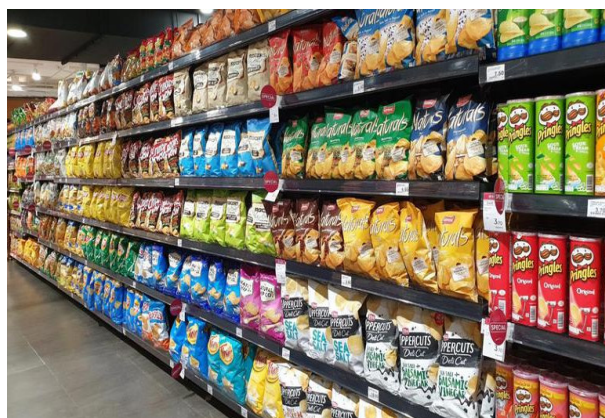
Among the respondents of this survey, 61 per cent were men while 39 per cent were women. Around 41 per cent of respondents were from tier one districts, 33 per cent were from tier two districts and 26 per cent were from tier three, four and rural districts.

As per the survey, one of the solutions to address this fast-growing problem is to introduce regulations to help consumers make informed choices as people should be able to distinguish between packaged and processed foods and the one that contains a high amount of salt, sugar, and fat content.

<https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/trends/story/70-indians-favour-warning-sign-on-packaged-food-8-say-no-sign-needed-survey-330797-2022-04-22/>

Give 'warning' label, not health star rating on junk food packages: Experts tell to FSSAI

The government should issue a 'warning' label on packaged junk foods instead of health star ratings as they are misleading and doing more harm to cus-



tomers than good, health experts said on Wednesday.

Health star rating is a labelling system that grades packaged foods on the scale of one to five stars.

If the government is serious about the “epidemic” of obesity and non-communicable diseases, the consumer needs to be cautioned about junk foods through ‘warning’ labels, public health experts gathered at the ‘National Conclave on Sustainable Food Systems’, organized by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in Nimli, Rajasthan, said.

“Health star ratings are designed by the powerful food industry to mislead the consumer. By pushing these, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will give license to glorify junk foods, which is the opposite of what should be done,” Sunita Narain, director general, CSE, said while leading the expert deliberation on the ‘Need for front-of-pack warning labels on ultraprocessed junk foods’.

The deliberations included about 50 experts from across the country, including Amit Khurana, programme director, Sustainable Food Systems, CSE; George Cheriyan, director, CUTS International, Rajasthan; Vandana Prasad, community pediatrician, Public Health Resource Network, Delhi; and Sanjay Pandey, lead advisor, Global Health Advocacy Incubator, India.

Front-of-pack labelling on packaged foods was first recommended by an the FSSAI-led committee formed in 2013.

“CSE was part of this committee. FSSAI then came up with a draft regulation in 2018, which had strict thresholds – limits to know unhealthy levels – based on those developed by the WHO for countries like India in the South-East Asia Region.

“Due to industry pressure, FSSAI came up with another draft in 2019. The food industry was still not pleased and this draft was repealed. From January-

June 2021, stakeholder consultations were held on the labelling design to be adopted, thresholds to be made applicable and nutrients to be displayed. CSE has documented all delays and dilutions until June 2021,” the organisation alleged in a statement.

The latest consultation took place in February during which it was made clear that FSSAI plans to go ahead with the ‘Health Star Rating’.

“The sole objective of the stakeholder consultations, which were heavily dominated by the packaged food industry, was to come up with a labelling system, which is industry-friendly,” said Khurana, who was part of these consultations, adding that “all this while, FSSAI has been insensitive to the information needs of the consumer”.

He alleged that the statutory body also ignored the global best practices and evidence around it.

“Instead, in an orchestrated way, through the scientific panel and commissioned studies, it is now getting ready to adopt a labelling system which is considered least effective and rejected across the world,” he said.

Health star ratings are depicted based on an algorithm at the back-end, which is not known to consumers, CSE said, adding that it is only adopted voluntarily in few countries such as Australia and New Zealand and only some food products carry it.

It has been rejected in several other countries as it can mislead the consumer and be easily manipulated by the industry, the CSE said.

The proven best practice in front-of-pack labelling is nutrient specific ‘warning’ labels, experts said.

They have been simple and effective in discouraging junk food consumption. Several Latin American countries, Canada and Israel have already adopted warning labels. Many other countries are considering them. Among them, the best known are symbol-based warning labels such as that of Israel.

These will be most suitable for India, as it would transcend the literature and language barriers, the CSE said.

“We have submitted our concerns to FSSAI. It can’t allow a system that will effectively nudge the consumer to make unhealthy choices. It will mislead the consumer because of its design, algorithm and inclusion of positive nutrients in the calculation. It can’t allow relaxed limits and voluntary adoption,” Narain said.

□□

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/cons-products/food/give-warning-label-not-health-star-rating-on-junk-food-packages-experts-tell-to-fssai/articleshow/90957359.cms>

Swadeshi Activities **Swavlambi Bharat Abhiyan - Meetings**

Pictorial Glimpses



Jaipur (14 April 2022)



Kashi



West Bengal (Centre)



Zila Sammelan, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand (24 April 2022)

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Sector 34-A, Chandigarh-160022

gurman1543@icloud.com

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