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Can the Communal Divide be bridged in India?



“Social harmony is the edifice of economic prosperity. Fanning mutual distrust, hate and anger among citizens, causing social disharmony is a shameful slide to perdition.”

Dr Manmohan Singh
13th Prime Minister of India
(2004-2014)

Britishers ignited the communal divide in India as part of its divide and rule strategy. Since the rebellions in the 18th century, the Hindu and Muslim communities were divided to rule pan India. The British empire exploited two communities and is the reason for polluting the mindset of these majorities in the country. Even after the partition, the deep scarred feelings of bitterness between these communities have been used as a tool to win elections. The riots that happened after regular intervals between these communities is the proof of this communal divide. Unless this is arrested, it could lead to mayhem and implosion.

The hate speeches at religious events depict the two communities as rivals and spread disharmony. Recently, in Haridwar, a three-day ‘Dharam Sansad’ saw some of the latest series of hate speeches. The speaker, a controversial figure, urged Hindus to take weapons into their hands against Muslims for a safe future. In 2029, it is predicted there will be a Muslim leader as Prime Minister. The speaker urged the Hindus to join together now so that this does not happen. He proclaimed that “Islamic jihad will be most powerful” if a Muslim leader emerges at the top. Many Muslim leaders ridiculed the event at Haridwar to fire communal tension between the communities. Political parties usually use divisive actions in their marketing campaigns in order to appeal to a specific community. This causes tension, making the platform controversial and easy to run on.

The movie ‘Kashmir Files’, depicting the struggle and hardship of the Kashmiri-pandits in Kashmir, was in the limelight all over the country. The after-effects of widespread promotion and success of this movie led political parties to provoke communal differences. The movie highlighted the lack of governance that led to the massacre on both sides of the community. At the same time, the leaders of Kashmir claimed that the movie hides the facts of the incident. Political leaders from Kashmir called for the formation of a commission to probe the exodus of Kashmiri pandits in the valley. They stated that the government should focus on improving the conditions in Kashmir rather than making it an agenda.

The latest incident of this communal divide happened in Jodhpur on the auspicious occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. The clashes between Hindus and Muslims were ignited by the hoisting of flags of Islam on the Jali Gate circle. This led to clashes where stones were pelted at the mob, hurting people from both sides. More police were deployed to the area when an intense situation occurred, but clashes continued, injuring nine officers and civilians.

With the rise in communication comes a rise in the divide. People are becoming increasingly polarised and we are experiencing a rise in hate speech that is being spread on social media platforms. To stop this communal divide from happening in the future, we need to be more responsible with our tempers. We need to be aware of what is happening around us and also take preventive measures like not sharing fake news or broadcasting propaganda on social media. The communal divide is a serious issue that needs to be tackled by respecting the better parts of both religions and supporting them as part of one nation.



Pradeep S Mehta
Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General

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India's tallest 203 feet marble statue

The tallest marble statue in India will be installed at Kota, Rajasthan, India.

The main attraction of Chambal River Front will be the 42-metre-high statue of Chambal Mata. This statue will be installed on a 20-metre pedestal, which will weigh 3 thousand tonnes. This statue, made of Vietnam marble, will be the tallest of the marble statues in India, and its height, including the pedestal, will be 203 feet. (DB, 06.03.22)

Ancient coins unearthed

Around 82 coins dating back to Pratihara (8-11CE) and Sultanate (12-15 CE) periods have been discovered together from an empty pond in Jamwaramgarh near Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.



The coins were found in an earthen pot spotted by Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) workers while digging the pond.

Experts concluded that the discovery of coins strengthens the historical importance of Jamwaramgarh as a flourishing town during the Amber Kingdom in the 16th century. (DB, 03.01.22)

Curtailing freedom for women and girls

The Taliban has ordered shop owners in western Afghanistan to remove the heads of mannequins, insisting the life-sized figures violate Islamic law.



A video clip showing men sawing the plastic heads of female dummies went viral on social media.

Since returning to power, the Taliban has increasingly imposed their interpretation of Islamic law, severely curtailing freedoms, particularly for women and girls. (ET, 06.01.22)

World's biggest national flag hoisted

The world's biggest national flag made of khadi was hoisted on January 15 (Army Day) on the hilltop near the Army War Museum to mark 75 years of independence.



After Leh in Jammu and Kashmir, and Mumbai, Jaisalmer was the third place where the world's biggest Khadi flag was hoisted.

The flag is 225 feet long and 150 feet wide and weighs around 1,000 kg and Khadi Gramodyog has made it.

(HT, 29.01.22)

Sojat mehndi to enhance global footprint

The renowned and sought-after Sojat mehndi received the Geographical Indication (GI) certificate.

The GI tag is expected to play a significant role in discouraging surrogate products sold as Sojat mehndi. Secondly, it is also expected to increase mehndi exports. Till now, it was the word-of-mouth publicity about its superior quality that helped to attract buyers, and now, there is government recognition of it.

Sojat mehndi is known for high lawsone, a red-orange dye, content. The quality is determined by its colour, purity, and dyeing property.

(Tol, 25.01.22)

Woman harassed over bindi

A woman professor of a private college in Bangladesh has alleged that she was harassed and threatened by a "man in police uniform" for wearing a bindi.

Lota Sumaddaer, a theatre and media studies lecturer at Tejgaon College in Dhaka, said she has been feeling unsafe since the incident.

In her complaint to the police, she said that a "police officer" on a parked motorcycle harassed her for wearing a bindi – a decorative mark applied on the forehead by women in the Indian subcontinent. (HT, 04.04.22)

Young champ of the underprivileged

From helping children in orphanages and government schools to serving after-school centres, there are more than enough reasons why one could look up to 21-year-old Akash Shroff, a final year student of BITS Pilani?

Shroff has won the prestigious United Nations V-award recently. V-Awards, an initiative by the UN Volunteers India, aims to celebrate young people making the world a better place for all through their acts of volunteerism. (DB, 13.01.22)

Muslims offer prayers at this temple

On the occasion of Telugu New year, Ugadi, Muslims sought blessings at a temple in Andhra Pradesh's Kadapa district.

The Telugu state celebrated the beginning of the new year. Following rituals, Hindus prepared 'Ugadi Pachadi' and visited temples across the state.



In Kadapa, Muslims lined up at the Lakshmi Venkateshvara Swamy temple at Devuni to get the blessing of the lord at the beginning of the new year. The temple is located 120 km from Tirumala Tirupati, the hill abode of Lord Venkateswara. (IT, 04.04.22)

Snake spotted on the plane

Passengers on an AirAsia flight had their trip rerouted after spotting an uninvited passenger on the plane.

In a video shared by the user, what appears to be a long snake can be seen slithering through an overhead light fixture. In the caption, the user wrote that the flight headed from the Malaysian capital city of Kuala Lumpur to Tawau had to instead make an emergency landing in Kuching. (www.npr.org, 11.02.22)

Anything for Love!

After being rescued off the Thai coast, a Vietnamese man who tried to row 2,000km from Thailand to India to see his wife was taken into custody.

Ho Hoang Hung set off from the Thai holiday island of Phuket in an inflatable rubber dinghy, equipped with water and instant noodles but no navigation system, planning to cross the Bay of Bengal near the start of cyclone season.

A fishing boat found the 37-year-old near the Similan Islands, about 80km off the Thai mainland, and contacted the navy's maritime security unit, which rescued him. He told officials he was trying to reach his wife, who works in Mumbai, after spending two years apart because of COVID travel curbs.

(Tol, 26.02.22)

Reviving Tigris

Garbage clogs the banks of Iraq's Tigris River in Baghdad, but an army of young volunteers is cleaning it, a rare environmental project in the war-battered country.

They pick up soggy trash, water bottles, aluminium cans, and muddy styrofoam boxes with boots and gloves, part of a green activist campaign called the CleanupAmbassadors.

More often, the garbage ends up directly in the Tigris, and it is one of Iraq's two major waterways, along with the Euphrates, facing a host of environmental pressures. (JP, 10.04.22)

Charged with faking a pregnancy

Sometimes, people lie and say they are sick to skip work. But a Georgia woman named Robin Folsom went one big step further when she faked a pregnancy to get seven weeks of paid time off.



While working as the Director of External Affairs at the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Folsom informed the agency about her pregnancy in late 2020 and claimed to give birth in May 2021.

Though Folsom had a 'baby bump,' one of her colleagues noticed something was not quite right about it.

(www.allthatsinteresting.com, 22.02.22)

Youth buys ₹2.6L dream bike

To coin a phrase, breaking the piggy bank for a ₹2. 6 lakh dream bike will



not take the average numismatist afar. But V Boobathi of Tamil Nadu's Salem did precisely that and took a brand-new Bajaj Dominar 400CC — paying the entire sum in one-rupee coins.

The staff at the motorcycle shop took 10 hours to count his three years of savings. Boobathi is a BCA graduate and worked as a computer operator with a private company before starting a YouTube channel for four years.

(IT, 28.03.22)

Bizarre 'Alien' creature found



A small creature found on the streets of Sydney, Australia, has stumped biologists, academics, and social media users alike. Harry Hayes was jogging when he stumbled upon the creature.

The city has been lashed by heavy rainfall recently, but the bizarre-looking animal was not found in a flood zone. Instead, Hayes found it while jogging through the Marrickville suburb of Sydney. (NDTV, 02.03.22)

Lost her iPhone a decade ago

Becki Beckmann lost her Apple iPhone 10 years ago. She searched high and low but could not find the device and eventually replaced it with a new iPhone.

But the Maryland resident was "super confused" about where the phone went as she had not left the house, and nor had she been drinking — where her iPhone

disappeared remained a mystery until very recently — when it was discovered inside the Beckmanns' toilet.

(NDTV, 28.02.22)

Memory loss from cold

Claire Muffett-Reece went to bed one night in 2021 with what she thought was a common cold. The following day, she slipped into a coma for 16 days, from which she woke up having lost 20 years of memories. She has now opened up about the harrowing experience.

Claire spoke about living with encephalitis or inflammation of the brain, which caused her to lose her memories. She appeared on the TV show Steph's Packed Lunch to mark 'World Encephalitis Day' on February 22, 2022. (www.mirror.co.uk, 23.02.22)

Netaji's Statue at India Gate

A statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose will be installed at India Gate in tribute to the legendary freedom fighter who captivated the country with his determination to liberate it from British occupation.



The statue, made of black granite from Telangana, will be placed under the canopy at India Gate in August 2022. Once installed, the grand statue will be visible from Raisina Hill.

The honour for Netaji is expected to go a long way to salve the hurt of his devotees who have been sore that the freedom fighter has been denied recognition due to him.

(ET, 23.01.22)

Women Inspiring the World

Second woman to hold the post

Senior bureaucrat Usha Sharma was appointed the Chief Secretary of Rajasthan following the retirement of Niranjan Arya, who has been made an



adviser to Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. Sharma is the second woman to hold the top bureaucratic post in the State.

Sharma was transferred to her parent cadre in Rajasthan by the Centre at the State government's request. After taking over the charge of the office in the State Secretariat, she said that she would ensure public participation in the administration and resolve people's grievances on priority. (TH, 01.02.22)

6,000km in 110 days

Sufiya Khan has set a Guinness World Record for the shortest time to travel the 'golden quadrilateral' - a network of national highways connecting Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai - by foot. The ultra-runner from Delhi completed a journey of 6,002 km in just 110 days, 23 hours and 24 minutes.

Sufiya began her run from the national capital on December 16, 2020. By April 06, 2021, she has completed the golden quadrilateral circuit. A gruelling journey, to be sure, but the 35-year-old athlete was determined to see it through. (NDTV, 30.03.22)



Rowing fishboat to repay dad's debt

Kaveri Dhimar, who once rowed a boat with her sisters to fish in dam backwaters to repay their father's debt, is one of India's top female canoeists.

Kaveri won seven gold medals for Madhya Pradesh in the 31st National Senior Canoe Sprint Championship and will represent India in the Asian Championships in Thailand.

Spotted in a sports talent hunt in 2017 and groomed at the MP Watersports Academy, the labourer's daughter has proved her toughness and determination on every occasion.

(Tol, 20.03.22)

Took the wheel to save a life

In January 2022, Pune resident Yogita Satav drove a bus for the first time to save a life. Her act of courage



has now been immortalised in an ad film by Kotak General Insurance.

Yogita Satav was part of a group of 20 women who had gone on a picnic to the outskirts of Pune. However, on the way to the picnic spot, the driver of their minibus complained of uneasiness and lost consciousness.

The driver's life was saved only because the 42-year-old homemaker took the wheel and drove the bus to a hospital. (NDTV, 07.03.22)

18-year-old brave girl foils robbery

In an inspiring incident reported from Surat, an 18-year-old girl reportedly foiled a robbery attempt when she confronted armed robbers

who had broken into her home. The braveheart saved her house and her sister at home.

Her courage and strength empowered her younger sister, who also joined forces with her elder sister to push and shove the assailant away. Her shouting woke her mother up, who also joined forces with her two daughters. Seeing that there was a chance of getting nabbed, the assailant chose to flee the crime scene.

(www.shikshaneWS.com, 31.03.22)

International Women of Courage Award

Chief Executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association and Supreme Court Lawyer Syeda Rizwana Hasan has been named for the annual International Women of Courage (IWOC) Award.

She won the award for her leadership in her mission to protect the environment and defend the dignity and rights of marginalised Bangladeshis.

She is among the 12 extraordinary women from around the world who won the award for working to build a brighter future for all.

(www.tbsnews.net, 09.03.22)

Best Women Entrepreneur

Successful woman entrepreneur and the Executive Director of Prevent Denpro Limited, Namrata Modi, was recently conferred with the prestigious Priyadarshini Award for the Best Women Entrepreneur from the Federation of Indian Women Entrepreneurs.

She is the first female entrepreneur from Jammu & Kashmir to win this prestigious award at the 6th International Conference themed "Mission Possible" held at the Institute of Studies in Industrial Development, New Delhi.

(<https://www.dailycexcelsior.com>, 01.04.22)

From balloon seller to model

In a testament to the power of social media, a street hawker from Kerala has become an Internet sensation after photos of her makeover went viral. Kimbo was selling balloons near a temple when photographer Arjun Krishnan spotted her.

The photographer quickly took a few pictures of the teenager, one of which he later posted on Instagram. The response it received was unexpected – the photo soon went viral online and led to Kisbu starring in a photoshoot that captivated the Internet.

(NDTV, 09.03.22)



Image Instagrammed by arjun_krishnan

India starts vaccinating 12 to 14 age group



More than 75 percent of those in the 15-18 age group have received their first dose.

India has begun giving the coronavirus vaccine to children between 12 and 14 years, weeks after it reopened schools. As per the government sources, around 7.11 crore children will be vaccinated under the new age group.

The new group will be administered Corbevax, the country's third homegrown vaccine.

India also expanded its booster dose programme by removing a restriction related to comorbidities. The change will allow everyone above 60 years of age to get a booster shot.

The country has administered over 1.8 billion vaccine doses since its vaccination drive began in January 2021. Around 94 percent of the country's adult population has received at least one dose and over 80 percent of the adult population has been covered by both doses.

The country began giving booster shots to healthcare and frontline workers and those above 60 with comorbidities in January. Since then, more than 10 million healthcare and frontline workers and another 10 million people aged above 60 have received booster shots, official data shows.

A vaccine programme for 15 to 18-year-olds also began in January – more than 75 percent have received the first dose. So far, India has reported nearly 43 million COVID cases, second only to the US, and more than 515,000 deaths – behind the US and Brazil. The country is currently reporting cases around the 3,000-mark every day. It had grappled with a third wave, fuelled by the Omicron variant, in January 2022.

The rollout

India had a slow start when vaccinations were opened for some 960 million eligible people in January 2021.

During this period, logistical problems, supply bottlenecks, vaccine hesitancy, and a debilitating second wave of COVID-19 made the rollout harder. In January 2022, India began administering booster shots to frontline workers and those above 60 with comorbidities.

But as the situation eased, it managed to ramp up coverage, with tens of thousands of public and private health facilities offering the jab.

The country delivered vaccines by drone to far-flung villages in northeast India's mountainous regions. Drones

were also used to ferry doses to the eastern archipelago of Andamans and Nicobar, where "transportation by boat" was taking a long time.

Though the programme missed its first, over-ambitious deadline of universal adult vaccination by December 31, 2021, it has hit some milestones. On September 17, 2021, India administered more than 20 million doses in a day in a record-breaking effort to mark Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 71st birthday.

In October 2021, it crossed the one billion mark, becoming the second country after China.

Which vaccines is India using?

India is currently using four vaccines - the Oxford-AstraZeneca jab, known locally as Covishield; Covaxin by Indian firm Bharat Biotech; Russian-made Sputnik V and now Corbevax.

Covishield has accounted for over 90 percent of the doses given to adults so far. Corbevax, a protein-based vaccine manufactured by Biological E, got emergency use authorisation from India's drug regulator on February 21, 2022, for the age group of 12-18 years.

The news item appeared in the British Broadcasting Corporation on March 16, 2022

Free education for girls

The state government's decision to extend fees reimbursement under the Right to Education Act (RTE) to girls studying up to Class XII in private schools would save over 20,000 girls from dropping out in the coming academic year.

Admission to private schools under the RTE covers students' fees only for Classes I to VIII. After Class VIII, poor students shift to either government schools or low-income private schools.

The scheme will cost ₹18 crore to fund 18,000 girls with a maximum reimbursement of ₹10,500 per month in 2022-23. The amount will be drawn from the Indira Mahila Shakti

Udyam Protsahan Yojana programme meant to provide financial aid to women entrepreneurs and impart skill training.



(Tol, 23.03.22)

Drive against plastic use

JMC-Greater launched a campaign against polythene use at the Lal Kothi vegetable market. Inaugurating the campaign, Mayor Somya Gurjar distributed cloth bags among people.



Free cloth bags were also hung on the cleanliness wall (Swachhta Dewar) for the needy. Gurjar appealed to the people to stop using plastic as it was dangerous for the environment.

She said strict action will be taken against traders who keep plastic bags. A fine of ₹1,000 will be charged for burning garden waste. (Tol, 31.03.22)

City to get 4 eco-tourism projects

The Jaipur Development Authority (JDA) will soon join hands with the Forest Department to develop four eco-tourism projects on forest land. After the announcement was made in the state budget for financial 2022-2023, the civic body has started an exercise on these projects.

To make Jaipur greener, around 100 hectares of Beed Govindpura on Kalwar Road and 160 hectares of Beed Goner, which are forest areas, will be developed on the lines of Kapoor Chand Kulish Smriti Van. (Tol, 20.03.22)

Register your complaints online

Consumers in the state will now be able to register their complaints with the consumer commissions online through the e-filing portal.



Facilities like e-notices, link to download case documents, VC link for hearing through video conference, facility to file written reply by the opposite party and alerts on SMS and e-mail are available on this platform.

Action will be taken against any person under Section 297 of the Municipality Act, 2009, if they use the free advertisement sites for putting up birthday or other congratulatory messages. (Tol, 29.01.22)

98k voter I-cards downloaded

Of the 11.04 lakh new voters in Rajasthan, who had registered themselves during the special summary revision-2022 with unique mobile numbers, only 98,397 have downloaded their electronic-EPIC (electoral photo identity card) since January 05, 2022.

Only those who have registered themselves with their mobile numbers can download their e-EPIC by completing e-KYC on the NVSP portal of the election commission.

An e-EPIC is a secure portable document format (PDF) version of the EPIC which can be downloaded on mobile or in a self-printable form on the computer. (DB, 23.01.22)

Policy on hoardings soon

The state government will frame a policy on displaying billboards and hoardings in cities. The indiscriminate display of hoardings spoils the beauty of the city skyline.

The policy should enumerate the spots in the cities where display boards could be allowed and also prescribe the size.

Though there were rules to putting up billboards, a trend has gained currency: people put up billboards and hoardings at every possible location in the city, even on birthdays of leaders and any social events. These billboards are not only a hazard to the citizens but spoil the city skyline. (IT, 02.01.22)

Ramgarh as 4th tiger reserve

Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary, which is among the proposed five sites in the country, is expected to be formally notified as a tiger reserve.



The Centre has already approved granting tiger reserve status to Ramgarh Vishdhari Wildlife Sanctuary, MM Hills in Karnataka, and Guru Ghasidas National Park in Chhattisgarh.

The process to formally notify the tiger reserve has begun. Once notified, it will become Rajasthan's fourth and come on the list of 56 tiger reserves of the country. (Tol, 23.01.22)

Linking Ajmer-Agra highways

To connect two important highways – Ajmer and Agra road with the Metro rail network – the Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation (JMRC) is gearing up to extend the Mansarovar to Badi-Chaupar corridor at both ends after taking up construction of approximately 4.85km.

The extension of the corridor will decongest the Walled City and provide improved connectivity to thousands of passengers coming from Ajmer and Agra road end, along with residents.

JMRC plans to extend the (east-west) corridor from Badi Chaupar to Transport Nagar. Similarly, to provide Metro route connectivity till the 200-Feet bypass junction, Ajmer Road plans are afoot to construct a 2km elevated stretch from Mansarovar station. (Tol, 19.01.22)

Speedy Resolution of all Complaints

State Women's Commission should make efforts for the speedy resolution of all complaints and cases pending at the Commission in a time-bound manner," CUTS International suggested to the Commission on International Women's Day. On the occasion, CUTS submitted a charter of key issues to Rehana Rayaz Chisti, Chairperson Women Commission Government of Rajasthan, to work on women's safety and protection.

Among the key issues on women's safety and protection that

5 Padmas from Raj

Paralympian and gold medallist Devendra Jhajharia of Churu and 1978 batch Rajasthan IAS officer Rajiv Mehrishi have been conferred Padma Bhushan, while another Paralympian Avani Lekhara, scriptwriter Chandraprakash Dwivedi and artist Ram Dayal Sharma have been conferred Padma Shri from Rajasthan.

PADMA AWARDS: THEIR HARD WORK GETS RECOGNITION



A total of 128 eminent people were chosen for the awards, including five from the state. The awards were given in three categories — Padma Vibushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri. Jhajharia is the country's most successful Paralympian, with two golds and a silver to his name in the javelin event. (DB, 26.01.22)

Revising Metro phase-II plan

As the state government's ambitious 'improvement of the crossroads' project is creating a conflict in the construction of the proposed Jaipur Metro Phase-II (India Gate and Ambabari) on Tonk Road, Jaipur Metro Rail Corporation (JMRC) has again started an exercise to revise the detailed project report (DPR).



The state government in the Budget did not make allocations for the long-pending Jaipur Metro phase-II, a 23.5 km corridor, as the project requires modification.

A JMRC official said, "The Jaipur Metro phase II on Tonk road conflicts

with JDA's signal-free project. The DPR will be revised again after the survey as some modifications are required."

The JMRC, in its last revised DPR, had proposed to construct stations at 21 locations, including at Rambagh, Tonk Pathak and B2 Bypass. (Tol, 22.03.22)

Paperless initiative in action

The state government has saved around ₹300 crore by going paperless and digital for government works. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) of Rajasthan, which is working to bring the government closer to common citizens, is now trying to make maximum use of e-technology for people's comfort.

To make government work transparent and accessible, the government presents digital vouchers and accounts to the Audit General through the IFMDS. (Tol, 31.03.22)



the organisation submitted include:

- establishing a scientific investigation cell at the Women Commission level to investigate and control crime against women by effectively coordinating with police etc.,
- creating women's advice and security centres in all the districts of the State and ensuring the participation of women members in these centres on behalf of voluntary organisations.

The chairperson promised to take immediate steps to implement the issues mentioned in the Charter and appreciated CUTS' work at the grassroots for the protection and safety of women.

Industries must Promote Healthy and Sustainable Diets?

George Cherian and Simi T.B*



Even well before the pandemic, food systems within a huge developing country like India faced enormous challenges in achieving equitable access to healthy, nutritious, sustainable and balanced diets for all.

Now, COVID-19 has further pushed the country behind in reaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has caused widespread loss of livelihoods and incomes, threatening the food security, health, and nutrition of poor and marginalised people. This can be corroborated by the latest Global Hunger Index Report, where India has slipped to 101st position of 116 countries, from its 94th position in 2020. Let's examine where the food industry stands with respect to churning out healthful and sustainable options for the post-pandemic, choosy consumer.

India's top five risk factors for mortality include high blood pressure, high blood sugar levels, and overweight/obesity. The prevalence of overweight and obesity is growing faster than the world average. Also, as quoted in the Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology journal in 2018, nearly 98 million people in India may have type-2 diabetes by 2030. The amount of insulin needed to treat type-2 diabetes effectively will rise by more than 20 percent worldwide over the next 12 years.

The Economic Survey 2020-21 also highlights those non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are now responsible for more than 65 percent of all deaths in the country. Even the World Economic Forum and Harvard School of Public Health had earlier highlighted the economic burden of NCDs in India in their study wherein it states that India stands to incur a cost of US\$4.58tn between 2012 and 2030 due to NCDs mental health conditions.

The situation became grave as the economic fallout forced many people to depend on cheap stomach-filling foods that lack nutrition. The share of vegetables, fruits, pulses, meat, fish and eggs in people's diet is significantly lower and whole grains accounted for more than needed. The government has invested in a national nutrition strategy to address such nutritional imbalances, including the multi-ministry flagship initiative called the Poshan Abhiyaan (nutrition mission). But even such schemes and other nutrition-specific awareness initiatives alone cannot help in meeting the objectives and demand coordinated action.

A vital role cannot be overlooked

Considering the extent of influence the food industry has on the entire food supply chain, the vital role in bringing sustainably sourced, nutrient-dense foods to the majority of consumers cannot be overlooked.

More importantly, the industry needs to support and facilitate healthy food policies and be attracted to invest more in sustainable innovation and marketing to manufacture and market healthier processed foods. In today's time, packaged foods are widely accessible, affordable, and consumed by most of our consumers, both urban and rural. It can, therefore, help provide access to healthy and nutrient-rich foods regardless of economic status.

Ultimately it brings benefits

Though food industries could face challenges while attempting to deliver both sustainable and healthy products and keep up with consumer needs for taste, affordability and nutrient density, the enormous opportunities such entities reap if they successfully address them are multitudinous.

From a business perspective, implementing an overall sustainable approach from farm to the plate can help reduce operating costs, increase yield and profit, ensure stable prices, minimise loss through waste, and, more importantly, lessen negative media attention on the extensive use of chemicals.

Reinforcing the positive

The threat to life and health caused by the pandemic has forced consumers to give greater thought to their overall health and wellbeing. Today, consumer awareness is on the rise and is significantly influencing purchasing decisions. So, enlightening and assisting them in identifying and picking easily available foods that are affordable and convenient but still nutrient-dense and sustainably sourced will likely be more profitable to business and the society, than advocating them to avoid foods they currently consume and enjoy.

*Director and Policy Analyst at CUTS International. The article appeared in Nuffoods Spectrum, on February 07, 2022

Sources: DB: Dainik Bhaskar; ET: Economic Times; HT: Hindustan Times; IT: India Today; JT: Japan Times; NDTV: New Delhi Television; TH: The Hindu; Tol: Times of India

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