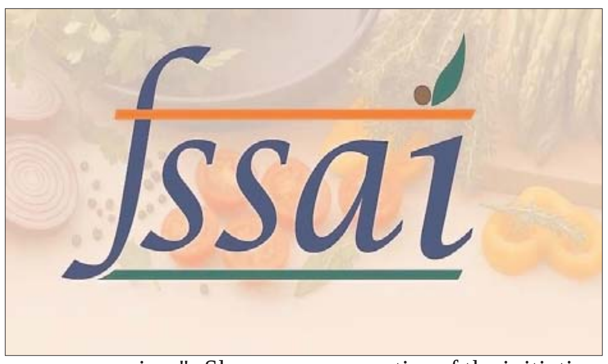
Consumers deserve nutritional information on food packs, industry backs FSSAI move: Orkla India

BENGALURU, SEPT 13: Leading packaged food firm Orkla India Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Sanjay Sharma has supported the sectoral watchdog FSSAI's proposed front-of-pack labelling norms, saying consumers have every right to know the nutritional details of the products they buy.



Responding to PTI over a query on front-of-pack labelling (FOPL) initiatives, Sharma said the industry is aligned with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI) intent to empower consumers to make informed choices as awareness levels continue to rise.

Consumers deserve greater information about the products they consume, and the food industry is fully supportive of the food regulator FSSAI's push in this direction, said Sharma, who is engaged with industry body CII on this issue.

"As an industry, I can tell you that the industry is very much with the regulator in this space where we want to ensure that, as the knowledge levels among consumers are rising, we should ensure that we give all the information to the consumers to make a thoughtful choice about the products that they are consuming," Sharma told PTI.

Sharma said rising consumer awareness makes it important to provide adequate information to help consumers make informed choices about the products they consume.

On Friday, the Supreme Court asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, which has proposed phased implementation of front-of-package labelling (FoPL) on packaged foods, to come up with more clarifications on the planned labels of "nutrients of concern", fat, sugar and salt.

He said the point of contention was not the principle of labelling but its format and implementation, adding that the industry has made "a lot of consultations and submissions" to FSSAI on the issue.

The broader industry is supportive of the initiative, while discussions continue on the format and implementation of the proposed labels, said Sharma, who is already engaged with industry body CII on this issue.

"The industry is (ready) for the entire thing. The question is what should be the label and how should it be done," Sharma said, noting that the industry has made several submissions to the regulator on the matter.

Orkla India, part of the Norwegian conglomerate Orkla ASA, is a leading packed food company here.

It owns household brands such as MTR, Rasoi Magic and Eastern, with a play in convenience foods such as ready-to-cook (RTC), ready-to-eat (RTE) meals, vermicelli, as well as in the blended and pure spices space.

Noting that the FOPL matter is currently pending before the Supreme Court, with FSSAI having submitted its recommendations, the Orkla India chief said he did not wish to "second guess" the apex court's eventual view.

He, however, underlined that FSSAI's standard regulatory process should ideally be followed for a matter of this nature.

"The standard process is to come out with a draft, do consultations with the industry, with the consumer bodies which take care of consumer interest, with all people who are concerned with regulations, with the WTO... and eventually get notified as legislation," he said.

Draft food regulations must be notified to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) before final notification, in line with India's international trade obligations.

"I do hope that those processes will be followed," Sharma added.

FSSAI's proposed FOPL regulations seek to mandate labels on packaged food indicating levels of sugar, salt and fat, aimed at helping consumers identify products high in these components. (PTI)

ITC expects Aashirvaad brand to double consumer spends to Rs 20,000 cr in 5 years

BENGALURU, SEPT 13: Diversified conglomerate ITC expects consumer spending on its flagship food brand Aashirvaad to double to Rs 20,000 crore over the next five years, from around Rs 10,000 crore currently, as it expands into newer food categories and adjacent segments, a senior company official said.

The company is amplifying Aashirvaad's play with a two-pronged strategy for the brand -- strengthening its core atta (wheat flour) business while expanding into adjacent categories such as ready-to-cook foods and frozen snacks, said Hemant Malik, Chief Executive Officer, Foods Division, and Executive Director, ITC Ltd.

Aashirvaad started its journey in May 2002 as a whole wheat atta brand and has since grown into one of the country's most trusted kitchen brands, with a portfolio of more than 200 SKUs (stock-keeping units).

ITC, which aspires to become India's leading FMCG player, has expanded Aashirvaad beyond wheat flour into staples, spices and fresh foods, and even the frozen category, now has consumer spends exceeding Rs 10,000 crore, he said.South Asians & Diaspora

Asked when the brand is expected to double its consumer spends to Rs 20,000 crore, Malik told PTI, "We will double in the next five years." Aashirvaad products are now manufactured across a network of 66 facilities spread across the country, enabling ITC to cater to diverse consumer needs pan-India. This vast network also helps ITC to reach consumers with its products "with the highest freshness," he added.

In FY26, ITC's FMCG products were reaching around 28 crore households with nearly Rs 37,000 crore in consumer spending.

Consumer spending is the total amount spent by consumers on its products, including net sales turnover, channel margins and applicable taxes.

According to Malik, the atta category itself continues to offer substantial opportunities for growth through segmentation and premiumisation as consumers increasingly seek products catering to specific nutritional, wellness and regional preferences.

The brand has expanded its portfolio beyond regular atta to include multigrain, high-protein, organic and millet-based variants, among others.

"Premiumisation is not merely about a higher price point. Consumers today are willing to spend on products that offer tangible value, whether through superior quality, convenience, health and nutritional benefits built through meaningful innovation," Malik said.

ITC is leveraging Aashirvaad's brand equity to enter new food categories and increase consumption occasions.

Through brand Aashirvaad, ITC has also entered the fresh foods space with its ready-to-cook range, including ready-to-cook chapatis targeted at time-pressed, younger households, each pack offering 10 chapatis without added preservatives and a shelf life of 5-6 days.

On expansion into adjacencies, Malik said products such as besan, vermicelli, rava, soya chunks, frozen naans and parathas, and fresh chutneys and sambar are part of its strategy to widen consumption occasions under the Aashirvaad mother brand.

"The objective is to be present in categories where ITC can meaningfully address consumer pain points through innovation and differentiation," he said, adding, "Today, we have a strong product portfolio in this space. Backed by deep consumer insights and extensive research, we have developed products that are genuinely different and help improve everyday cooking experiences."

ITC's newest bet in the packed food segment through brand Aashirvaad is sattu (made up of dry-roasted gram), which is rich in protein and fiber. This has also been supplemented by 'Sattu Masala' under its spice brand Sunrise, a brand which it had acquired in 2020.

Malik said this category holds significant headroom for expansion beyond its current markets.

"Sattu is one such food that is valued for its taste, versatility and nutritional benefits. While we have initially launched it in the eastern markets, we see significant potential in the product. Our ambition is to scale it nationally and make 'sattu' a widely accessible and affordable protein option for consumers," Malik said.

Aashirvaad Chana Sattu, launched in Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, is made using a traditional sand-roasting process, the company said. It comes in two regional variants - Chana Sattu with Jeera in Bihar, and Plain Chana Sattu in West Bengal and Jharkhand - besides a Rs 10 value pack offering 10 gm of protein.

SML Ltd weighing IPO within 2 to 3 years, eyes new chemical entity pipeline

NEW DELHI, SEPT 13: Agri-inputs maker SML Ltd, formerly known as Sulphur India Limited, is evaluating a stock market listing within the next two to three years as it looks to fund the development of new chemical entities (NCEs), Managing Director Bimal Shah said.South Asians & Diaspora

"We have not completely decided - we are also evaluating it," Shah said in an interview to PTI, adding that the debt-free company expects greater clarity on the timeline within the next one to two years.

Mumbai-based SML Ltd said it is among a handful of Indian companies developing NCEs - proprietary new molecules rather than generic formulations - with one new molecule expected to reach the market soon and others in the pipeline.

"We are working on NCEs, new chemical entity in the last three years. We have a new molecule coming up very soon. ... NCE is a very important focus for us. Of course, this requires a lot of investment," he said.

Bringing a single NCE to market can cost USD 70 million-USD 80 million, Shah said, and the company has so far self-financed the research. These considerations may eventually lead the company toward listing, but no decision has been made yet; it's still evaluating, Shah said, adding that he expects to have a "clearer sense of direction this year or next", since further steps will depend on related groundwork being completed.

SML Ltd holds roughly Rs 450-470 crore in cash on a near debt-free balance sheet; funds, Shah said, could be deployed toward acquisitions, regulatory assets or strategic tie-ups, alongside the NCE program.

The company pointed to its earlier increase in ownership of Rotam India, an active ingredient manufacturing facility, as an example of the kind of backwards-integration deal it could pursue again. "We've maintained a stable balance sheet over the years, and this accumulated fund is intended for the right opportunity - potentially an acquisition, strategic tie-up, or backward integration," he said. The listing deliberations come as SML pushes deeper into three business lines beyond its traditional sulphur fertilizer base: crop nutrition, crop protection and biologicals.

Shah said crop nutrition, where the company is promoting balanced, nutrient-efficient formulations rather than single-nutrient products, is likely to be the fastest-growing of the three over the next three years, both in India and globally.

SML has lowered its revenue target for the current fiscal year to about Rs 1,600 crore, from an earlier goal of Rs 1,800 crore, citing weaker monsoon rainfall, US tariffs and shipping disruptions tied to ongoing geopolitical conflict. That would still mark an increase from roughly Rs 1,200-1,300 crore a year earlier, aided by price increases of 15-20 per cent across its product range.

International business, spanning more than 80 countries, generated roughly Rs 600-700 crore last fiscal year; SML is targeting Rs 700-800 crore this year and Rs 1,000 crore within two years, though it flagged continued tariff and shipping-related uncertainty.

Roughly 70 per cent of SML's export revenue comes from crop-protection products, including insecticides and fungicides using microencapsulation and water-dispersible granule technologies, the executive said.

SML Ltd separately unveiled cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar as its brand ambassador this year, betting his national profile can accelerate farmer adoption of its sulphur-based fertilizers. The company estimates only a small fraction of India's farmland currently receives adequate sulphur nutrition, despite government soil surveys showing widespread deficiency.

"We are trying to connect nutrition, sports and agriculture together," Shah said, adding that Tendulkar had sought out the partnership after noting he had never worked with an agriculture-focused company before.

The company recently launched seven new products across crop protection and crop nutrition. Shah said crop protection products converts to sales faster since it operates on an AI-to-AI (active ingredient) basis.

Russia imports record fuel from India as Ukraine strikes hit refineries

NEW DELHI, SEPT 13: Russia imported a record 172,000 tonnes of oil products in August, including gasoline refined from Russian crude at a refinery in India that is partly owned by Russia's Rosneft, as Ukrainian drone strikes disrupted Moscow's domestic refining capacity, according to a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).Executive Branch India supplied 70 per cent of Russia's oil product imports in August, including 120,000 tonnes of gasoline worth 78 million euros, CREA said in its monthly analysis of Russian fossil fuel exports and sanctions. The volume of Russian fuel imports was more than seven times the previous monthly record and three times the total imported during all of 2025.

All of the gasoline from India was loaded at the Vadinar refinery and sold by EU-sanctioned Nayara Energy to Rosneft, CREA said. Rosneft owns 49.13 per cent of Nayara Energy, while Vadinar sourced all of its crude from Russia during the first eight months of 2026, compared with 81 per cent for all of 2025, according to the report.

"Russia is therefore paying a refinery that it partly owns to process its own crude into fuel it can no longer produce domestically, before shipping it back halfway around the world," CREA said.

The shipments underscore the impact of a sustained Ukrainian drone campaign against Russia's oil refineries and energy infrastructure, which has reduced domestic fuel production and contributed to shortages, according to CREA.

Each cargo of gasoline exported from Vadinar to Russia was transferred between vessels in a ship-to-ship operation off Egypt before being unloaded at Russia's Arctic port of Beloe More, the report said. All the vessels involved were sanctioned tankers, while four of the six had previously operated under false flags, CREA said.

Russia's gasoline imports surged even as the country, historically one of the world's largest exporters of refined petroleum products, faced declining exports. Gasoline accounted for 74 per cent of its total oil-product imports in August, compared with just 6 per cent on average between 2023 and 2025.

South Korea supplied a further 18,000 tonnes of oil products to Russia in August, mostly gasoil, while Egypt exported 25,000 tonnes of diesel worth 16 million euros, CREA said.

Russia's seaborne oil-product exports fell 21 per cent by volume in August, while revenues from products unloaded at destination ports dropped 32 per cent from July to 78 million euros per day - the lowest level since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Oil-product loadings at Russian ports have fallen for three consecutive months and were less than half their August 2025 level, CREA said.

Tuapse, Russia's fourth-largest oil-product export port before the full-scale invasion, did not load a single oil-product cargo for the third consecutive month after sustained Ukrainian drone attacks since May.

Ukrainian strikes also disrupted crude exports through Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Crude loadings there fell 58 per cent month-on-month in August, while loadings stopped for nine consecutive days, the longest reported interruption at the port since the start of the full-scale invasion, according to CREA.

Overall, Russia's fossil-fuel export revenues fell 8 per cent in August to 604 million euros per day, while export volumes declined 7 per cent.

The fuel trade comes as India remained Russia's second-largest fossil-fuel customer in August, behind China.

India imported 4.8 billion euros of Russian hydrocarbons during the month, with crude oil accounting for 4.1 billion euros, or 87 per cent of its purchases, CREA said.

Indian imports of Russian crude nevertheless fell 24 per cent from July after reaching record levels in the previous two months. Imports at the Jamnagar refinery fell 15 per cent, while those at Vadinar rose 5 per cent and Paradip increased 1 per cent, according to the report.

Manipal Hospitals scouts for acquisitions in Andhra, Keralam, Delhi-NCR; bets on AI-led healthcare

NEW DELHI, Sept 13: Manipal Health Enterprises Ltd is setting its sights on expansion in various states, including Telangana, Keralam, and Delhi-NCR, while pivoting towards a "physical plus digital" healthcare model driven by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

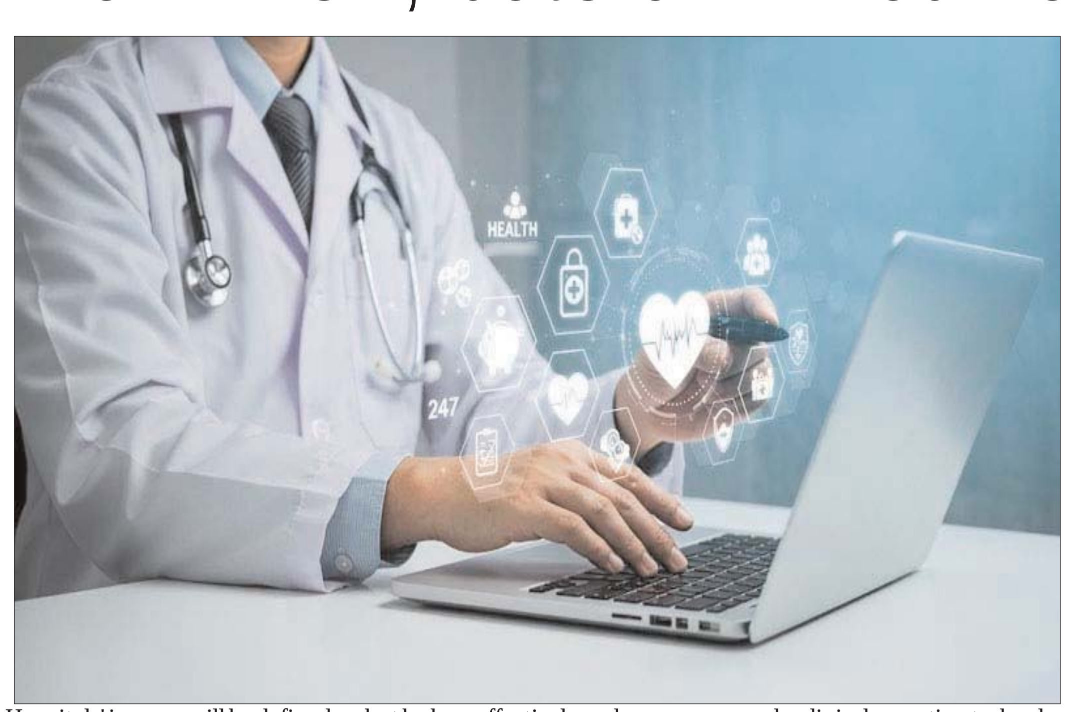
The healthcare major is actively evaluating strategic opportunities in Telangana, Keralam, Andhra Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh to selectively deepen its presence in identified markets, Manipal Health Enterprises said in its annual report for FY26.

Manipal Hospitals continues to evaluate inorganic growth opportunities across Karnataka; Maharashtra and Goa, including the Mumbai-Pune economic corridor; and Eastern India, comprising West Bengal, Odisha, Jharkhand and Sikkim, it said.

A key pillar of its upcoming infrastructure is the greenfield project in Juhu, Mumbai. The group recently completed the acquisition of the remaining land and building for this project for a total consideration of Rs 495 crore, of which Rs 130 crore is payable subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions.

On the technology front, the company is scaling a unified Hospital Information System (HIS) to link clinical, diagnostic, and administrative workflows across its network. Future investments are directed towards AI-enabled nursing handovers -- already launched at 24 hospitals -- and wireless patient monitoring platforms.

The group is also implementing call centre automation through AI-driven chat, voice, and omnichannel assistants to manage triage inquiries and appointments.



"The next phase of Manipal Hospitals' journey will be defined not only by the capacity we add, but by how effectively we harness the collective strengths of our people, clinical expertise, technology platforms and integrated network," said Dilip Jose, Managing Director and CEO.

The company's clinical strategy remains centred on "CONGO-R" -- a cluster of six complex specialties, including cardiac sciences, oncology, neurosciences, gastro sciences, orthopedics, and renal sciences.

These specialties accounted for 64.3 per cent of gross inpatient revenue in the 2025-26 fiscal year. To support this, the group is investing in advanced medical infrastructure such as robotic surgical systems, linear accelerators, and PET-CT scanners.

This growth trajectory follows a strong financial performance in the 2025-26 fiscal, where revenue from operations grew by 25.4 per cent to Rs 10,336 crore, while EBITDA stood at Rs 2,644 crore. The year was marked by the successful integration of Sahyadri Hospitals in Maharashtra and Medica Synergie in Eastern India. Regarding its long-term capacity plans, the group aims to add approximately 2,426 licensed beds by 2030, comprising 483 brownfield and 1,943 greenfield beds.

As of March 31, 2026, the network comprised 49 hospitals and 13,037 licensed beds across 14 states and Union Territories, serving over 76 lakh patients during the year.

The company said it added over 5,500 beds between 2020-21 and 2025-26. "It was the leading consolidator among private hospital chains in India by bed additions," the annual report said.

"We enter the next phase with a larger and more integrated platform, clear execution priorities and a continued commitment to remain a trusted brand for delivering quality healthcare," Jose added. (PTI)