

'A slew of health and wellness products to be rolled out soon'

B SUMANT, executive director of ITC, tells **Avishek Rakshit & Ishita Ayan Dutt** in an interview, that the company has always been 'vocal for local', and has introduced products designed in India, sourced in India and made in India. It is now working on a range of products to suit the times. Edited excerpts:

What is the current level of capacity utilisation in factories?

We are able to meet market demand for our products. The way we design our factories – the 'Make in India' Integrated Consumer Goods Manufacturing and Logistics (ICML) facilities that are spread across the country, it is for the long term. So, we always keep enough extra reserve capacity in all our plants.

What are the challenges as on date in operations?

When we started in March, the challenges were enormous. We have now adapted with agility to the new ways of working which includes adhering to all social distancing and hygiene norms. We had to realign all our operations adjusting to the new normal.

How would food sales compare with normal times?

We have seen a gradual evolution during the pandemic. The first phase of the lockdown was all about consumers stocking essential products, including staples and spices. Then, people realised that this was going to continue for a while and products like biscuits and noodles started selling. Then over time, consumers also went on to buy discretionary food products like snacks and chocolates. Now, people realise that the current situation is here to stay for a while so normal consumption is progressively being resumed. A lot of do-it-yourself products are getting preference as people are trying to recreate the experience of a restaurant at home.

How many products were launched during the lockdown?

We launched a range of innovative products in the health and hygiene space. We witnessed demand for surface cleaning and came up with the Savlon disinfectant spray. It was created in a record time. Then, we launched

Nimwash, a fruit and vegetable cleaning product. We have also just launched Savlon Wipes, another product suiting the times and designed for convenience. We launched the 50 paise Savlon sachet, taking the sanitizer to the masses. We launched the B Natural + in association with Amway, where we have included a natural immunity building ingredient. We are also working on a range of products where we are doing clinical trials. There is a pipeline of health and wellness products that will be rolled out going forward

Are you changing your rural strategy with the changing landscape?

ITC's multi-pronged presence and engagement with rural areas is quite extensive and an area that receives significant strategic consideration. Given that the recent reforms can give new wings to the critical food processing sector, ITC's continuing farmer engagements, agri

linkages, distribution reach and initiatives are well poised to respond to the emerging demand impulses. We have been focussing on expanding our presence in the rural markets even before the pandemic.

You are already into spices with Aashirvaad, how would Sunrise add value?
 Spices is a local business — every locality, every state and every province have their own taste and flavour preferences. Sunrise is very popular in the east — it has got a wide range of products.

How is ITC responding to the government's "vocal for local" call?

ITC has always been vocal for local. We are a national champion and take pride in developing world class Indian brands from scratch that create, capture and retail full value within India. ITC has, over the years, invested extensively in developing a



vibrant portfolio of world class Indian brands which support millions of farmers and creates large scale livelihoods in the country. A bouquet of 25 Indian vibrant brands have been created from scratch. As a relatively late entrant into FMCG, we were up against all the global giants. But we went extra lengths to bring in differentiated products and we are proudly Indian because all our world-class products are designed in India, sourced in India and made in India with Indian R&D capabilities.

In the value chain, are you looking at import substitution for any of the products?

As a part of our "Nation First" philosophy, we focus on domestic procurements, unless circumstances compel us to do otherwise. For Fabelle, for example, the chocolate comes from Madagascar because India is not a chocolate growing country. The ingredient is grown only in certain parts of the world. A majority of ITC's brands anchor domestic agri value chains and create large scale livelihoods. To give some examples, B Natural, ITC's fruit juices and beverage brand sources fruits directly from Indian farmers instead of importing concentrates. Also, its notebook brand Classmate sources pulp through large scale forestry programmes. Similarly, ITC's Mangaldeep brand of agarbattis supports indigenous bamboo value chains, instead of importing raw agarbattis.



B SUMANT
 Executive director, ITC