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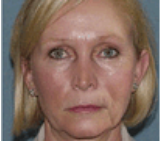


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Ask Prabhu

Mr. Prabhu Chawla, Editorial Director of The New Indian Express



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## Even Microbes Have a Dalal Street!

By IANS - NEW YORK | Published: 14th January 2014 01:57 PM  
Last Updated: 14th January 2014 01:57 PM

Ever heard of a biological market where microbes set up shops, bid and fight for a better trading partner?

Sounds crazy but according to a new study, microbes in our body set up their own markets, compare bids for commodities, hoard to obtain a better price and generally behave in ways share traders do at Dalal Street.

“We have long been aware that trades among a wide range of organisms are not blind exchanges but instead ones shaped by ‘market conditions’ such as price, quality and competition,” said Joan Strassmann, professor at Washington University in Missouri, US.

“Single-celled organisms had been shown to avoid bad trading partners, build local business ties, diversify or specialise in a particular commodity, save for a rainy day, eliminate the competition and otherwise behave in ways that seem to follow market-based principles,” he added.

They even foresee practical applications of the work. It might be possible, for example, to manipulate ‘market conditions’ in crop fields to drive nitrogen-fixing bacteria to trade more of their commodity - a biologically available form of nitrogen - with crop plants, said the study that appeared in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

“The microscopic nature of microbial systems means it is easy to misunderstand their interactions. An economic framework helps us focus on what is important,” said David Queller from Washington University.

“For biological markets to evolve, you actually only need that individuals can detect co-operators and respond by rewarding them with more resources,” said Gijsbert Werner, a doctoral candidate at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

The researchers found that the fungi compare the resources on offer by different plants, and adjust their resource allocations accordingly.

Some fungi even hoard resources until they get a better deal, the study added.

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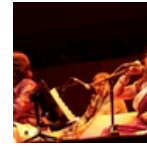
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