

Pune is home to happiest Indians in the world

LONDON: The happiest Indians in all the world live in Pune and India's Western seaboard is absurdly happy compared to both Delhi, its political centre, and Silicon Alley down south in Bangalore, while Kolkata is our capital of cheerlessness, according to a survey of gross national happiness across the planet.

The survey is published here by GfK-NOP, the market research organisation that happily boasts it figures among the top four worldwide, with sales of EUR 672 million last year and operations in 63 countries.

It reports that more than half of all Pune residents say they are "very happy with the overall quality of life". Pune is closely, if surprisingly, followed by its richer, sassier neighbour, Mumbai, which comes in at 42 per cent.

Hitherto-unregarded Nagpur comes a close third with 39 per cent of its residents incredibly happy with the way they live. In contrast, just 26 per cent of Dilliwallahs say they are very happy and Bangalore's bits-and-bytes revolution still doesn't allow more than 27 per cent of its residents to describe themselves as very happy.

Curmudgeonly Kolkata, meanwhile, has a happiness quotient totalling a mere 18 per cent of its harried people. GfK-NOP's European director of Research Nick Chiarelli told TOI this might be explained by "big city syndrome", which showed Londoners the unhappiest in all of Britain and Delhi deeply dolorous compared to smaller urban centres such as Pune.

But West Bengal's melancholic bhadralok have not managed to depress India's overall happiness ratings, with just over a third (34 per cent) of all Indians everywhere cheerily claiming they are very happy with life, the survey says.

This gives India an ecstatic ranking of fourth in the global happiness league table that covers more than 30,000 people in 36 countries, said GfK-NOP's Amanda Wheeler. This is 10 percentage points behind top-scorer Australia, with its Bondi Beach image of blue skies and seas, beautiful people, barbecue lifestyle and beatific residents.

Forty per cent of Americans say they are very happy, just a little behind the Aussies, while Egypt is just two percentage points ahead of India.

Chiarelli said it was unsurprising that a developing nation such as India appeared so happy with life because "we were talking to upscale urban Indians" because the survey was conducted for multi-nationals such as Toyota, Sony and McDonalds. Curmudgeonly Kolkata, meanwhile, has a happiness quotient totalling a mere 18 per cent of its harried people. GfK-NOP's European director of Research Nick Chiarelli told TOI this might be explained by "big city syndrome", which showed Londoners the unhappiest in all of Britain and Delhi deeply dolorous compared to smaller urban centres such as Pune.

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Despite its 18-month-old entry into the privileged European club of nations, the European Union, Hungary came in at the bottom of the happiness chart, with 35 per cent of its citizens saying they were either "disappointed" or "very unhappy". Thirty per cent of Russians were just as dejected.

Gfk-NOP said the happiness breakdown, country-by-country, across five continents was part of a larger annual study of consumer attitudes, values and behaviours. Wheeler said this was the first time since 1997 that "we have included questions on what makes people happy (and) how happy people deem themselves to be."

Sociologists said the happiness barometer appeared to follow in the all-singing, all-dancing tracks of Bhutan's King Jigme Sime Wangchuk, who is increasingly notching up publicity points for his relatively recent model, which measures Gross National Happiness rather than Gross Domestic Product.

The new survey came just hours after Venezuelan economist Frank Bracho declared that trying to measure happiness could actually threaten it, but commentators said the new market focus on the happiness quotient, rather than possessions and wealth, may be a welcome and positive move away from naked materialism.

The survey, which uniquely tried to quantify every nation's satisfaction with "the good life", found widespread regional disparities in India's categorization of happy, satisfied, and dreadfully dolorous people.

Nearly all of Delhi's residents placed good health at the top of their happiness-inducing factors; 91 per cent of Kolkata said the same, while just 76 per cent of Mumbaikars believed they needed to be hale and hearty to call themselves happy.

Delhi believed having a good home was almost as important as health, with 94 per cent of the capital's residents listing it near the top of their happiness-inducing factors.

Almost as many Pune residents shared Delhi's preoccupation with a good home, while just 76 per cent of land-poor Mumbaikars said they felt it was important to live in a decent flat to be happy.

In a sociological disparity pointed out by South Asia watchers, hip Mumbai, with its fast-changing view of relationships, rated a happy marriage very low on its scale of happiness-inducing factors.

But 65 per cent of Delhi said it was hugely important, in contrast with the dismal 29 per cent of Mumbaikars. Overall, however, 89 per cent of Indians everywhere agreed with Delhi and Pune's perception of health equaling happiness.

And 83 per cent said a good home was overwhelmingly important. Only 51 per cent said they thought a happy marriage made for a good life.