

## Safe food, hygiene will make eating out a pleasure in Delhi

In a move to project Delhi as a 'safe food destination' during the 2010 Commonwealth Games, a massive refurbishment programme is on to assess how hygienic the eateries in the metropolis are and how edible the food is.

The first leg of the survey showed that 125 eating joints among some of the most sought after places in popular hang-outs like South Extension, Khan Market, Gole Market, ITO and Dilli Haat failed to make the grade.

Cafes, snack bars and restaurants were found to be violating the basic norms. The toilets were dirty and kitchens dingy and smoky; the staff cared little for hygiene and served food without gloves.

The survey, conducted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), covers 883 eateries and hotels situated in close proximity to the Games' venues.

Sarita Nagpal, CII deputy director general, told IANS that eating joints that are likely to attract tourists during the Games are under scrutiny.

'The Delhi government has short-listed the middle and three-star level hotels and eateries most likely to be frequented by visitors during the Games next year. What we at CII are doing is to survey these places for food safety and hygiene,' said Nagpal.

'If the food safety and hygiene standards are found not up to the mark, then we train the people to raise the maintenance levels. The experience at the 125 hotels and restaurants fell below the required levels,' she added.

The second leg of the survey, which begins in another week, will cover some other prominent areas in the capital.

In the South Extension area, the CII found the eateries and restaurants congested with nonfunctional exhaust fans, non-potable water, preparation of snacks out in the open and lack of hygiene among the catering staff.

In Khan Market and Gole Market, the hygiene levels in some of the well-known eateries like Kaleva, Bangla Sweets and Gupta Sweets were satisfactory, but in others it was not. Waste bins were found overflowing and there was water stagnation behind the restaurants with plates and cups strewn around.

The assessment was the same in Dilli Haat -- the well-known shopping complex in south Delhi with a wide range of food joints from various states.

Lepcha Dorji, a waiter at one of the eateries of northeastern states in Dilli Haat was unaware of the CII exercise.

'I don't know of any such assessment, although our manager did mention that some officials will come to check our place so we should keep the tables and cooking area clean,' Dorji said.

Nagpal said the findings would be submitted to the government as well as the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). 'The objective is to get the eateries a certification from the Quality Council of India'.

Talking about the training programme for the staff, Nagpal said: 'It will be an on-the-job training on basic etiquette and hygiene, like wearing a uniform, gloves and head gear and trimming nails. The training will be just for a day or two.

'The aim is not to close down food joints and train the staff, forcing the hotels to incur losses. We only want to impress upon them how to welcome visitors during the Games,' she said.

Delhiites have welcomed the initiative.

Anubha Dey, a homemaker said: 'The biggest fear of eating out is the hygiene factor -- clean water and fresh foodstuff. I have two school-going kids and they love eating out, but often they come down with stomach infections because of the lack of sanitation.

'I hope the move will be sustained after the Games too,' she said.

Nagpal said the CII has prepared a set of safety guidelines for street hawkers and vendors.

'We have prepared a set of guidelines for the vendors. However, it is up to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to implement them,' she said.

Delhi chief secretary Rakesh Mehta promised to provide cold carts with an official stamp of hygiene to lay out Delhi's delectable street food -- spicy kachauris, piping hot gulab jamuns and spicy samosas - during the Games.

Delhi Mayor Kanwar Sain said that mobile squads of health officials will inspect these carts regularly to ensure safety standards.

'As of now, 1,000 carts are ready for vendors who have licences. They will have to make sure the food is tasty and the surroundings are clean,' Mehta added.

Picturing the scene a year from now, Nagpal chuckled: 'So a year from now, it may be a very different Chandni Chowk that you walk into. The otherwise laid-out-in-the-open halwa and sweets will be all covered and served to you with a smile by a smartly uniformed halwai wearing a pair of gloves.'

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