

## KFC, Pizza Hut come to Nepal

After setting the capital abuzz for months, fast food giants Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and Pizza Hut Sunday finally descended on Kathmandu with a soft launch in one of the most upmarket shopping and touristy areas of the city.

The two American food chains have been brought to the Himalayan capital by Devyani International, an associate company of India's RJ Corp headed by Ravi Kant Jaipuria, which already has a tie-up with Yum! Brands, the Kentucky-based world's largest fast food restaurant company that owns KFC and Pizza Hut with more than 36,000 outlets in over 110 countries.

The inauguration of the first multinational chain of restaurants in Nepal, delayed by the political instability, ironically comes on a day the former Maoist guerrillas have announced a third phase of anti-government protests that will culminate in a three-day general strike from Dec 20.

During their decade-old insurgency, the former rebels had targeted American ventures in Nepal, like Coke and Pepsi.

RJ Corp is also the bottler of Pepsi brands in India and Nepal.

Devyani International officials said they are excited to enter Nepal and have extensive plans for growth and expansion in the Himalayan nation.

'Consumers in Nepal are ready for the international eating-out experience,' a statement issued by the company said. 'Nepal is a promising market for these brands and their entry will give the Nepali economy a boost by creating job opportunities for the locals.'

The first two outlets have been launched at Durbar Marg in Kathmandu near the former royal palace and two five-star hotels.

Nepal's first commercial bank, NMB Bank, partnered with Devyani International to bring the American twain to Nepal.

KFC is sourcing the chicken from Brazil while the staff at both the outlets have been trained in India.

After Kathmandu, new outlets are expected in the sunny city of Pokhara, one of the most popular tourist destinations. The American eating-out experiences will be open to the public from Wednesday.

On the eve of the launch, Nepali food entrepreneur Shyam Kakshapati dismissed fear of competition from the giants to the indigenous food outlets and products.

Kakshapati, CEO of Nanglo's, one of Nepal's best-known chain of restaurants that serves pizza and burgers along with the local momo - dumplings - and sekuwa - local kebabs, predicted that while locals might flock to the big two initially out of curiosity, once that is satisfied, they would return to their old favourites.

Another local chain, Bakery Cafe, enjoys a special place in diners' and tourists' hearts because of its

unique way of employing youngsters with hearing and speech disability and combining service with social responsibility.

In Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world, the pricing will also be a factor that will help the local eateries hold their own against multinationals.

*Sudeshna Sarkar* ( © IANS / India eNews)