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Rlys puts kitchens under CCTV watch to ensure quality train food

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Kolkata: In a move to better the quality of food being served on trains, South Eastern Railway (SER) has upgraded kitchens at various locations and put them under CCTV watch. While a Food Safety & Standards Authority of India certification has been made mandatory to ensure compliance of food safety norms, surprise checks are also being carried out at the kitchens and erring vendors are fined.

The ministry of railways, which recently increased the prices of train food after seven years, said vendors should not complain about not being able to serve good food, now that the rates had been increased. With the hike in prices came a few changes, the most significant of which is the Railway Board doing away with a la carte meals. According to SER officials, the a la carte meals were the source of corruption. "Vendors would say the prices were too low for good-quality food. They should have no complaint now that the rates have been revised," said SER CPRO Sanjoy Ghosh. "It is on record that vendors were ready to pay thrice the tender value to bag a contract. They made up by serving bogus a la carte dishes and fleeced passengers. The waiters were apparently not paid but were provided with only food and accommodation in pantry cars. The waiters would receive only 10% of the value of the a la carte dishes sold to passengers." The monitoring will ensure that the Board's orders are not flouted.

Citing how passengers were fleeced, an official said waiters would offer special dishes to passengers. On receiving orders, dal from a normal veg meal would be served as "special", by throwing in a few green peas. Parwal curry would be transformed into aloo-matar or aloo-paneer and the charge per meal would go up by Rs 50-Rs 70, an official said. To stop such corruption, Ghosh pointed out that all of the 96 la carte items on train menu, except for samosas and pakoras, had been scrapped.

“Once we started surprise checks, we collected Rs 27,18,000 as fine from vendors between January and October. Third party audit is also being conducted to check quality of food in pantry cars and kitchens. Passengers can complain on phone, twitter or mail,” Ghosh added.