



Mumbai ka Manifesto: 'Serve us level-playing field, free of official tangles'

Ahead of the state polls, industry-insiders speak about their concerns and the changes they would like to see.

Across the city and its suburbs, over 15,000 restaurants cater to the needs of the densely populated metropolis. This industry has its share of problems – from over-regulation by multiple licensing requirements to labour costs – which are only going uphill. Ahead of the state polls, industry-insiders speak about their concerns and the changes they would like to see.

Sukesh Shetty, general secretary of the Indian Association of Hotels and Restaurants (Ahar), an umbrella body of over 8,000 restaurants across the country, said that over the years there has been a slowdown in the industry but more regulations have been brought in. What is needed is their streamlining, he said. "When regulations go up, costs go up and ultimately there is a difference in the prices offered by a regulated vendor and an unregulated one."

On duplication of licences, he said there is a licence required under Section 394 of Mumbai Municipal Corporation Act, commonly known as the health licence, and another required by the Centre – the FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India). "The FSSAI, being a central licence, should have superseded, but both have continued."

Shetty said all they want is a level-playing field, referring to the online aggregators that promote grey kitchens (unlicensed) and give deep discounts apart from promoting people who pay them for advertisements. "They can give such huge

discounts because they have venture capitalists, but medium restaurants cannot afford to do that. This eats into our business."

MANIFESTO SUGGESTIONS

Do away with duplicate licensing requirements

Make licensing a single-window process, handled by only one department

Create level-playing field - eateries with only take-away, for instance, have fewer regulations

Rein in illegal street hawkers

Ward level staff harass small-time hoteliers for personal gains by twisting rules. While their superiors understand our concerns, we need a separate cell to lodge complaints against those who create trouble

Santosh Shetty, president, Ahar

While the objectives of the laws, licences and single-use plastic is noble, they get lost in the maze of distorted interpretation on the ground during implementation. Need of the hour is a simplified standard operating manual

Sukesh Shetty, general secy, Ahar