

About 60%-70% of Mumbai's restaurants have re-opened, which are operating at 50% capacity:HRAWI

Earlier this week, Maharashtra's Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said he doesn't want to impose a lockdown in the state but "helplessness is also something". He made this remark as the state has been reporting over 8,000 daily COVID-19 cases for the last few days.

Since January 2021, Maharashtra crossed the 6,000-mark after a lull of three months. Mr. Thackeray said that he would be compelled to announce a lockdown, if the growth of COVID-19 cases was not reduced within two weeks; especially in light of daily cases crossing the 8,000-mark last week.

This news has expectedly disheartened the state's hospitality segment. According to Mr. Sherry Bhatia, President of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI), there are around 210,000 restaurants in Maharashtra. Of this approximately 30% continue to remain shut due to debts and financial losses they accrued as a result of the pandemic induced lockdowns.

It is well-known that the hospitality industry, which is undergoing the most trying periods in recent times, is attempting to recover from last year's losses. With news about a spike in COVID-19 cases, restaurants already in the state have witnessed around 30% drop in the customer footfalls. Initially, there was a spurt in demand or footfalls, but it soon fizzled out. Restaurants are currently operating at 50% capacity. Also, across the State, the timing for taking the last order is staggered. While it is 1AM in Mumbai, in certain cities it varies from 9PM to 11PM. In some districts, it is also 5 PM! Moreover, the timing restrictions are changed almost every month. For hotels and restaurants, this uncertainty causes loss of opportunity.

Business for most F&B establishments is still around 35%-40% of pre-pandemic levels in the state. Almost 30% restaurants have not re-opened for business. A significant number of these will most probably shut permanently, if they don't re-open by the March-end.

The Maharashtra Government has been very receptive of our demands. It recently agreed to our long standing demand for according industry status to the hospitality sector. So, we are sure that it will also extend the operation timings and allow us to operate at full capacity, soon.

We are also thankful to the Government for waiving off the excise license fee on pro-rata basis along with the roll-back of the 15% annual fee increase for 2020. However, in view of the industry's distressed situation, we have requested the Government to allow license holders to pay the Excise license fees in four installments in the year 2021-2022.