

## **Maharashtra hotels to reopen, 50% may shut for good**

With hotels and restaurants preparing to reopen after nearly four months, the prospects of around 50 per cent of them shutting permanently also loom large, top players warn. The Centre has indicated July 8 as the target date for the hospitality industry to throw open its doors to guests and patrons. The situation is bad and getting desperate every day. Till June 30, the hospitality industry piled up around Rs 1.25 lakh crore losses. Many hotels and hospitality chains have expressed inability to continue operating partially or fully. Despite the hospitality sector contributing 10 per cent to the national gross domestic product (GDP) and accounting for 12.50 per cent of jobs, the industry has been completely ignored by the government.

A day after a delegation of the hospitality industry met Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday, the government issued orders with stringent guidelines permitting hotels, lodges and guest houses to resume at one-third of normal operations. 53,000 hotels in the regulated sector, and a similar number in the unorganised sector, which impacted revenues of the recognised industry. Besides, there were around 5,00,000 eateries, encompassing all outlets -- from roadside dhabas to restaurants and big chains, which would be hit by the 50 per cent closure.

The situation was alarming even in Maharashtra where over 1,00,000 big and small restaurants would shut, entailing a major disaster in the form of over 5,00,000 job losses, said Hotels and Restaurants Association of Western India (HRAWI). With barely 20-25 per cent availability, there was shortage of skilled staff for restaurants, and at one-third guests/patrons norms, it could be difficult even to recover operating costs.

Besides, there has been no decision on the demand for moratorium and other relaxations sought by the industry. Union Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel has not "met the industry even once" and there's no clarity on the government's plans for the hospitality sector, which will make its survival "difficult and unviable".