

## **Maharashtra: Restaurant body urges state govt to do away with 10 pm deadline, extend operation timings**

HRAWI has submitted a representation to chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, chief secretary Sitaram Kunte, and environment and tourism minister Aaditya Thackeray requesting an extension of operation timings for hotels and restaurants in Maharashtra. The association has recommended restoring the operation timings of hotels and restaurants as per the license held by establishments, on all days of the week from Monday through Sunday. It has also requested the government to offer relaxation on the condition that restaurant staff be fully vaccinated for resumption of operations.

Presently, all restaurants, bars and hotels are operating as per the 10pm deadline, when the original deadline is 1.30am. The association has stated that since October 2020, restaurants in Maharashtra were allowed to operate under restrictions at 50 per cent capacity with restrictions on timings. But the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic led to another complete lockdown, and later more severe restrictions were imposed on restaurants.

“The rental and salary expenses, servicing of old debts, negative cash flows, and the statutory payment obligations have made running a hotel or restaurant a most unviable and unsustainable business under the present situation; and all its revival efforts have gone down the drain. However, things are looking up for the state with around three crores of its population having received at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccine and the number of new cases is steadily on the decline,” said Mr. Sherry Bhatia, President, HRAWI.

"Under the circumstances, we request the government to take immediate measures to restore economic activities in the state and help its citizens to come out of the huge financial losses they have suffered during the last 18 months. For businesses such as restaurants, the curtailed timings of 7am to 10pm is just not viable so we request the government to restore the timings of restaurants to the operation timings as per the license timings of each establishment on all days of the week,” Mr. Bhatia added.

Amongst all the sectors, the hospitality sector in the country has taken the biggest hit due to the pandemic. Business came to a complete standstill after the lockdown came into effect. As of today, 30 per cent of hotels and restaurants in the country have shut down permanently due to financial losses.

Over 20 per cent of hotels and restaurants still haven't opened fully and the remaining 50 per cent are running in losses with revenues below 50 per cent of the pre-Covid levels.

"The present timing for restaurants from 7am to 10pm does not complement this business. This is only adding to the losses caused due to the two lockdowns. We recommend that the government allows hotels and restaurants to revert to the pre-pandemic timings through the week. This will not only benefit restaurants but it also will promote staggered venturing out of the public," said Mr. Pradeep Shetty, Sr. Vice President, HRAWI.

"Other than this, we also request the government to be considerate and provide hotels and restaurants relaxation on the condition that the staff be fully vaccinated for resuming operations. We request that the government allows hotels and restaurants to undertake the pending vaccinations if any, in a gradual manner. We are sure that these positive measures would immensely benefit the people of Maharashtra to come out of the huge economic turmoil caused by the Covid-19 pandemic," Mr. Shetty added.