

## **Despite surge in footfall, Mumbai restaurants struggle to stay afloat with the 10 pm deadline**

Restaurateurs across the state collectively heaved a sigh of relief when their operation timing was extended from 4pm to 10pm. However, it's been almost a month since these relaxations were announced, but the hospitality industry still struggles to stay afloat. Apart from operations permitted only till 10pm at 50 per cent capacity, it's the lack of transportation facilities, high rent and property taxes and slow vaccination drives that continue to hinder their growth. "None of the other metro cities in the country have imposed such an unreasonable deadline. We hope that the government will understand our plight and ease the restrictions to allow restaurants to operate till 1.30am," says Mr. Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice President, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI).

Nightlife is a substantial part of the city's culture, and for months, Mumbaikars had been looking forward to dining out late in the evenings after work. "But people either have to rush through their dinner now or, in many cases, they are unable to even finish their meals. Time spent at a restaurant is for leisure and a little relaxation. However, with the 10 pm deadline, the experience feels more like following a schedule," says Mr. Pradeep Shetty, Senior Vice President, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India (HRAWI). Last month, owners of restaurants, bars and hotels across Maharashtra protested to restore their original operation timings. Members of the associations even met Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray to voice their grievances and concerns. "When we spoke to the CM at length, we learnt that the disaster management cell has been guiding him. And while doctors are adept at running hospitals, the concerns of the hospitality industry are different. We can understand the fear they have, but right now, the focus should be on livelihood. The CM's intentions are actually great, but they aren't involving the real stakeholders in the decision-making process, so it doesn't work.

While the deadline extension from 4pm to 10pm did provide some respite to many in this beleaguered food and beverage industry, restaurateurs now hope for further extensions till the licensed timing of 1.30am.