

## 27 Restaurants In Guwahati Served With Closure Notice In 13 Days

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GUWAHATI: Several restaurants and food joints in the city have come under the scanner for serving unhygienic food over the past one month raising concerns among people.

Officials of the food safety department informed G Plus that the department has served closure and improvement notices to as many as 27 restaurants between August 1 and August 13. Further, out of these 27 restaurants, 15 were operating without license.

Most recently, on August 13, a notice was issued to Gam's Delicacy Restaurant located in Ganeshguri area of the city.

According to authorities, the restaurant failed to maintain basic hygiene standards resulting in its closure for seven days for proper renovation.



As per the officials of the food safety department, the restaurant used expired spices and stale fish and meat were found in the cold storage of its kitchen.

In addition to Gam's Delicacy, a few other restaurants in Ganeshguri area were also served with a seven-day closure notice. These restaurants include Dichang, Mandakini, Ashirbad Hotel and Laxmi Hotel.

“In Ganeshguri area, there are many hospitals and people from the hospitals come and eat food in these restaurants. Hence, we have inspected these hotels and found that the food served here is done so under unhygienic conditions,” said a food safety officer.

Prior to this, five other restaurants in the city were issued the seven-day closure notice by the food safety department for failing to abide by the Food Safety and Standards Act, maintain basic hygiene standards in their premises and unauthorized operation.

These restaurants included Punjab Cabin, Shubhraj Hotel and Restaurant, Hotel Crown, Basanti Hotel and Chakum Chakum Fast Food.

Further on August 3, a notice was also served to the iconic Reboti Chat House located in Panbazar, Nagkata Pukhuri on unhygienic grounds. It was found that the kitchen was not in hygienic condition and lacked sufficient space. In addition to the kitchen, the infrastructure of the overall restaurant was also not maintained in a sound condition.

Authorities informed that they keep conducting continuous random checks in various restaurants and eateries in different parts of the city.

“We had received complaints from some of the customers at some of these places and then decided to inspect them,” said senior food safety officer, Tarun Das. He added that apart from this they also conduct random checks in nearby food joints as well.

Das said that in most of these restaurants, the major issue was low hygiene standards maintained in the kitchen and sub-standard food quality.

“In addition to having an unhygienic kitchen, many of these restaurants also face problems of drinking water. During our inspection we have found that some places do not have safe drinking water or some do not use filtered water,” Das further added.

Food safety officials mentioned that in order to ensure that the restaurants which have been served with improvement notices show an actual improvement in the quality of food and hygiene standards, they inspect the restaurants again after the period of seven days.

The restaurants are allowed to re-open only if the inspectors are satisfied with the overall quality of the food joint. In some cases, the restaurants also had to remain shut for an extended period of time after the seven-day period.

Further, the department is also mulling over starting a helpline number wherein the general public can register their complaints regarding any restaurant. A proposal has already been submitted to the state government in this regard.

In the wake of recent mushrooming of restaurants and food joints across the city, the officials said there are several restaurants which are conducting business without license and are unregistered. For this, they conduct random checks of restaurants.

Training on hygiene needed: Restaurant owners

On the other hand, while the restaurant owners have appreciated the government’s initiative to maintain safety and quality standards, they feel that the government should take other measures too apart from just issuing a closure notice.

Debo Barman, member of All Assam Restaurant Association and owner of J14 fast food chain informed G Plus, "It is good that the government has issued these notices because there should be some regulatory body to look after the parameters related to hygiene. But it is more important for them to educate the people involved in running a restaurant. A lot of restaurants don't know what the basic criteria for hygiene are."

Restaurant owners feel that the authorities should consider conducting some workshop or training for restaurant employees which would help them in the longer run as imposing fines on restaurants would only be short-term measure and would not serve a greater purpose.

"After conducting such drives the government should mark and classify restaurants according to the quality and hygiene levels maintained by them. They could mark them as A, B or C grades where the most hygienic restaurant will be categorised as A," said Barman.

All Assam Restaurant Association was formed in July this year with the objective to become a single voice organization to represent the restaurant industry in Assam. The association works towards the development of the restaurant industry and to find solutions for the difficulties faced by the stakeholders at different stages of their operations.