

## Watch what you feed and eat

The Food Safety Commissioner has set March 31 as the deadline for submitting the license and registration applications.

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By Express News Service

KOCHI: The food poisoning incident that claimed the lives of 13 devotees at a temple in Karnataka in December 2018 has prompted the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to issue a directive to all the states to be vigilant. Acting on the directive, the District Collector has called a meeting on Tuesday to discuss steps needed to prevent such incidents from happening in the district, where thousands frequent on daily basis to various religious institutions.

The Food Safety Commissioner has set March 31 as the deadline for submitting the license and registration applications. According to D Sivakumar, Assistant Food Safety Officer, the order had been passed by the FSSAI last year itself. "But, it was not taken seriously. The Karnataka temple incident has brought to light the importance of monitoring the food being prepared and distributed at various religious institutions," he said.

"The rules governing the food business operators (FBS) are applicable to temples, churches and mosques when it comes to preparing and distributing food as an offering," he said. According to FSSAI rules, food business operators (FBO) are defined as any undertaking, whether private or public, for profit or not, carrying out any of the activities related to any stage of manufacture, processing, packaging, storage, transportation,

distribution of food, imports and including food services, sale of food, or food ingredients.

"They have a multitude of roles and responsibilities toward achieving food safety in their business. The aravana production in Sabarimala was recently brought under the ambit of this rule. At present, the enterprise is a licensed one. The same thing has happened in the case of the Attukal annadanam. The residents' associations who undertake annadanam have registered themselves with the Food Safety Department. Around 1,000 licenses have been issued for this purpose," he said.

The point behind the exercise is to have a person responsible for maintaining the quality of the food being distributed, he added. "The entire process is a voluntary one. Nobody is being compelled by the department. But, it would be better to be safe than sorry," he said.

According to him, a food business operator who has an annual turnover of 12 lakh and above has to procure a license. While those with a turnover below 12 lakh need to register themselves.

"The aim is to set in place a fail-safe mechanism. If a person is made responsible for maintaining the quality of the food being prepared, then we can be assured that the set parameters are achieved," he said.

#### FSSAI Rules

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#### Deadline for application

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