



Ministry of Railways undertakes various Initiatives to improve Catering Services

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23 Million passengers travel on Indian Railways on a daily basis. Indian Railways provide approximately 1.1 million meals to passengers every day out of these 1 million are provided on board itself.

Catering services on Indian Railways can be classified into two broad categories viz. Mobile catering and static catering services. At present, there are 360 pairs of trains with pantry cars, which include 22 pairs of Rajdhanis, 25 pairs of Shatabdis, 18 pairs of Duronto trains and 295 pairs of mail/express trains. There are about 9686 Major and Minor Static Units on Indian Railways, which include 50 Jan Ahaars outlets, 224 Food Plazas/Fast Food Units.

Provision of catering services to its passengers having diverse tastes and choices, on such a large scale, is an onerous task. There have been challenges to improve the catering services over Indian Railways and for the last three years not only an in-depth analysis has been undertaken to identify the root causes but also structural reforms have been initiated to solve the problem institutionally. The in depth analysis revealed that unless the current policy was changed and contract frameworks completely overhauled, things would not change permanently. It was also realised that unless the quality of food at source is not controlled, onboard quality would not change. Hence Hon'ble Minister announced unbundling of Food production and Food disbursement through a revamped New Catering Policy. Under this policy, ultra modern kitchens ranging from mega to nano with partnership of private sector would be established which would use the most hygienic and latest equipment for food preparation. Hon'ble Minister in his first budget speech, had also announced the launch of E Catering services on train, which would allow passengers to order food from the brands of their choice. Now you can order Pizzas or Burgers or even Dal Makhani on train. Interestingly such a service is not available in many railways of the developed world. Hon'ble MR also instituted a Zero Tolerance policy towards catering. In the last six months itself, we have terminated 7 contracts, blacklisted 16 contractors, taken action against 21 officers and imposed fines in excess of Rs 4.5 Crores.

In order to achieve the objective of improving quality of catering services in Indian Railways various steps have been undertaken in recent years. Here is a brief summary of the initiatives.

1. New Catering Policy, 2017

New Catering Policy has been issued on 27th February 2017 with the objective to provide quality food to rail passengers by unbundling of catering services on trains. IRCTC has been mandated to carry out the unbundling by creating a distinction primarily between food preparation and food distribution. In order to upgrade quality of food preparation IRCTC will set up new kitchens and upgrade existing ones.

The salient features of the new Catering Policy 2017 are as under: -

- IRCTC to manage catering service on all mobile units. Pantry car contracts awarded by zonal railway to be reassigned to IRCTC.
- Meals for all mobile units to be picked up from the nominated kitchens owned, operated and managed by IRCTC.
- IRCTC not to outrightly outsource or issue licenses for provision of catering services to private licensees. IRCTC to retain the ownership and be fully accountable for all the issues pertaining to setting up and operation of the Base Kitchens and quality of food.
- IRCTC to engage service providers from hospitality industry for service of food in trains.
- Kitchen structures/land/space to be handed over by zonal Railways to IRCTC, for a period of 10 years extendable for another period of 5 years, on a token license fee.
- IRCTC to be responsible for management of Food Plaza, Food Courts, Fast food units within the ambit of this policy.
- The setting up/ development / refurbishment of new or existing Base Kitchens/Kitchen units to be undertaken by IRCTC. These kitchens are to be owned, operated and managed by IRCTC. The new base kitchens would be set up through PPP ensuring best in class vendors and practices to get incorporated. International consultants Price Water House Coopers has been engaged to developed the concessionaire agreement document for Base Kitchens and Services on board trains. The main features of the new contract are:
 - a) Two packet system is being strictly implemented to allow only those vendors which have good credentials.
 - b) The eligibility criteria for vendors have been re-looked to allow more reputed vendors to participate.
 - c) Licensing model for catering contracts is being relooked to make the mobile vending viable and with right incentives and penalties to eliminate

overcharging

- d) Economic viability of base kitchens is being worked out to make vendors avoid short cuts.
 - e) Training of staff of the vendors being made mandatory
 - f) IRCTC to supervise the base kitchens by recruiting professionals
 - g) Route approach is being adopted to ensure good quality on the entire route.
 - h) Unbundling in food preparation and food distribution is being implemented in the SBD
 - i) Use of Technology is being mandated to prevent overcharging by issue of electronic receipts and tracking of food
 - j) Prior approval of IRCTC is being mandated to ensure food from reputed brands and at the right price is supplied.
 - k) Document mandates supply of Janta khana to cater to the demand of the poor
 - l) Mandating pre booking of food in all trains to avoid overcharging
 - m) Mandating regular feedback from passengers and linking the performance to payment to the vendor
- IRCTC to involve/empanel Self Help groups for providing catering related services.
 - Zonal railway to manage static unit (catering stall /milk stalls/ trolleys etc.) except base kitchens and kitchen units to be handed over to IRCTC at A-1 and A class stations.
 - Provision of perpetual renewal has been done away with. Now it has been envisaged that tenure of all static units (except kitchen units and Food Plaza) shall be 5 years only. Tenure of Food Plaza shall be for a period of 9 years.
 - Allotments of General Minor Units at all category stations to be done through open, competitive, two-packet tendering system from the eligible bidders by divisions.
 - For the first time, it has been envisaged that allotment of Special Minor units (reserved category) at all category stations will be done by divisions through open tendering system within the similar reserved category. The technical eligibility criterion has been simplified.
 - 33 % sub quota for women in allotment of each category of minor catering units at all category of station to be provided.

2. E-Catering

- E-catering service on IR is managed by IRCTC. Initially, e-catering service was train specific and made available in 1350 trains which did not have services of Pantry car or Train Side Vending. As a major initiative during September 2015, this scheme has been reoriented to make it 'Station Based E-Catering' in place of train specific e-catering. In the first phase, a pilot project has been undertaken on 45 major stations and subsequently extended to all 'A-1' & 'A' category of stations which is presently under implementation. E-catering service is now available on 357 railway stations and the average supply of meals under this scheme is around 6000 meals per day which was around 400 meals per day during Oct' 2015.
- Revamp of E-Catering services in September 2015 also permitted Food Aggregators to join the E-Catering initiative. Aggregators like, Railrestro, Zoop, Comesum, Mera Food Choice, Rail Darbar have been integrated through API covering 529 vendors and 244 offline vendors have also been incorporated for e-catering services across 357 stations.
- Passengers travelling from these stations are now able to access E-Catering facilities for all trains passing through these stations. IRCTC is facilitating booking of meals through a specified phone number/ website / SMS / Mobile Apps etc. Passengers having mobile number are able to book meals under this scheme. CoD facility to passengers under this scheme has also been made available.
- The Payment gateways integrated on E-Catering Portal:-

PAYTM	E-wallet, Net Banking and Credit/Debit cards on Portal and Mobile app
HDFCPG	Credit/Debit Cards on Portal and Mobile app
COD	COD
Mobikwik	Wallet in Mobile app

Mobile App along with four digit (1323) all India Toll Free number has also been launched by IRCTC. Mobile app - 'Food on Track' is available on Android and IOS.

- IRCTC has been further advised to reorganise and revamp marketing strategies to popularise e-catering and achieve the target of 1 lakh meals per day which is presently around 5000 to 6000 per day.
- IRCTC has established a call centre and has also operationalized E-catering website www.ecatering.irctc.co.in for this purpose. Passengers can pre-order the meal from the different options available as per the choice, for delivery at the opted stations through the e-catering (website & phone/SMS call centre). The mode of payment in e-catering shall be Pre-paid i.e. online payment as well as Cash on delivery (CoD) basis. The shortlisted vendor shall deliver the pre-ordered meal to customer on stationary train at the opted station. The opted meal is communicated to the Vendor through SMS as well as email at the time of booking and also again at about 2 hours in advance of delivery time (Delivery time is the train arrival time on a particular station). The Short-listing vendor can provide meals through his catering units on all India basis. Each unit/location, requested by vendor, to be included for e-catering project is required to have all statutory licences as required under the central/state laws and should comply with the laws of the land. The shortlisted entity may request for addition of more locations/units during the currency of the Short-listing. The shortlisted entity may supply food items under e-catering project only from its approved (by IRCTC) locations/units to the stations in the reasonable vicinity of the said units.

3. Water Vending Machines

- The project of setting up WVM was launched on 7.12.2015. With an objective to provide potable water at nominal rates, water vending machines have been installed at stations. Clean R.O. water is dispensed through these water vending machines to travelling passengers at affordable rates.
- IRCTC has been mandated to set up water vending machines on railway stations. 1106 WVMs have already been commissioned at 345 stations. 1000 more WVMs are to be installed at stations shortly.
- Selling price of the dispensed water through these machines is much cheaper than bottled mineral water. The rates of dispensed water are as under:-

Quantity	Refill	With Container
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	(Amt. in Rs.)	(Amt. in Rs.)
300ml	1	2
500ml	3	5
1 ltr	5	8
2 ltr	8	12
5 ltr	20	25

Present status of WVMs

Total No. of stations where WVMs are in operation	Total No. of WVMs in operation	Estimated Employment generated through WVMs	Average annual License fee per WVM	Total No. of WVMs planned to be installed during 2017-18	Total No. of Stations where WVMs are planned to be installed during 2017-18
345	1106	2000	74,000	1100	450

4. Ready to Eat (RTE) Meals: -

- In order to provide more options to passengers in trains RTE meals like Veg biryani, Masala Upma, Poha, Idli Samber etc are being provided to passengers. These RTE meals have long shelf life and are very useful in meeting the exigencies like late running of trains due to fog etc.
- As a pilot, the 'Dehydrated Meal Technology' being used in Airlines is being introduced in Railways. This technology will ensure provision of hot food to passengers merely by adding hot water.
- Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Defence Food Research Laboratory (DFRL) for transfer of technology of Retort Pouch Processed Foods on 27.06.2016.
- During the course of this process, IRCTC has prepared approx 36,000 Ready to Eat (RTE) packets and distributed /sold it through IRCTC managed departmental/licensee mobile/static units and other CSR(Corporate Social Responsibility) activities.
- Further, as per new Catering Policy 2017, the mobile catering will be unbundled by having separate contracts for onboard service & food production /supply. Hence, IRCTC will be setting up a grid of base kitchens across Indian Railways network, facilitating supply of hot & hygienic food in trains.

5. Janani Sewa & Children's menu

- Hon'ble MR in Rail Budget Speech 2016-17 announced as under:-

"75. We would like to mitigate the hardships that mothers undergo while travelling with their infants and, for this purpose, we will pilot availability of children's menu items on trains. Further baby foods, hot milk and hot water would be made available on stations and changing boards for babies would be provided in train toilets.

- In compliance with the above Budget Announcement, to mitigate the hardships faced by travelling mothers, Janani Sewa has been introduced on 27.4.2016 to ensure provision of baby food, milk and hot water from nominated catering stalls.
- Further, Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has been advised on 20/05/2016 to ensure availability of children menu through e-catering.
- New Delhi, Lucknow Jn., Lucknow, Jaipur, Ajmer, Howrah, Chennai Egmore, Pathankot Jn. and Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Nagpur, Pune, Surat, Moradabad etc stations are few of the stations which were pioneers in providing the service over IR

6. Self Help Groups (SHGs)

Empanelment of Self Help Groups (SHGs) to provide healthy, wholesome regional cuisine at an affordable cost to the travelling public through e-catering has been initiated and 9 SHGs have been empanelled at 10 stations. The groups empanelled are as follows:

- 4 in Andhra Pradesh:
 - o Shri Vani (Vijayawada)
 - o Sri Srinivasa (Vishakhapatnam, Anakapalle and Tuni)
- 1 in Karnataka
 - o Spoorthy Janaabhivrudhi Samsthe (Mysore)
- 2 in Kerala
 - o Café Kudumbashree (Ernakulam and Ernakulam Town)
- 3 in Madhya Pradesh
 - o Laxmi Mahila Mandal (Saugor)
 - o Sanskar Mahila Mandal (Saugor)
 - o Prayas Swa Sahayata Sangatham (Saugor)
- 1 in Maharashtra
 - o Maher Lok Sanchalit Sadham Kendra (Savantwadi)
- 1 in West Bengal
 - o Manorma Pariseba Sambay Samity (Adra)

SHG at Savantwadi - MAHER LOKSANCHALIT SADHAN KENDRA

- Started on 3rd December 2016.
- Kitchen at Malgaon, Sawantwadi
- SHG comprises of 15 women
- Menu specialty - Malvani Cuisine
- Meals per day – Approx. 8 to 10 priced at Rs. 25 to Rs.515
- Mode of transportation for supply of food from kitchen to train - Bike or Auto.

Proposed Initiative to proliferate SHGs

IRCTC has been asked to create an IT portal on its website for empanelling more and more SHGs across Indian for sale of catering items and handicrafts, artefacts etc.

7. Optional On Board Catering

- On an in depth analysis over complaints made on catering services provided by Railways it was felt that a 'Vikalp' should be given to travelling passengers in terms of option of opting out of mandatory food service in Rajdhani/ Shatabdi trains. The trial of optional catering services to passengers has been started on the following two trains w.e.f 09.06.2016 onwards for journeys to commence on the opening day of ARP.
 - o Train No. 12954-53 AG Kranti Rajdhani;
 - o Train No. 12025-26, PUNE – SC Shatabdi Exp.
- Catering services are included by default
- Passengers have to 'opt out' from the mandatory food option
- The catering apportionment charges are excluded from the total ticket fare accordingly. This facility is available in all tickets such as tickets from PRS counters, e-ticketing portals of IRCTC and such tickets shall be issued with reduced fare
- This scheme has been started from 09/06/2016 onwards for journeys to commence on the opening day of ARP i.e. 7.10.2016 to 20.11.2016 (for 45 days).
- Percentage of passengers opting out of mandatory catering services on the above mentioned two trains during the trial period was **5.15%**.

- The issue of further implementation of optional catering on other trains managed by IRCTC is to be issued shortly.
- Though only 5% passengers opted out of the mandatory food service however, it is again being proposed that in trains where catering service is provided by IRCTC the 'Vikalp' should be re-introduced.
- This opt out option has been recently provided in Tejas Train between Mumbai and Goa
- It has been further decided that **Optional on board catering would be rolled on all Mail express trains**. This would help in better calibration of meals required and hence lesser wastage.

8. Third Party Audit

- All Zonal Railways have a detailed institutionalized mechanism for monitoring of quality and hygiene of catering services through regular, surprise and periodical inspections. If any deficiency is found, corrective actions are taken including penal actions like imposition of fines, termination of contract according to the gravity of the offence. Third Party Audit of catering services are to be conducted at periodic intervals by independent and reputed auditing agencies accredited by NABCB (National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies) as empanelled by the Zonal Railways. The parameters for audit include all aspects of catering services like personal hygiene, infrastructure facilities, cleaning and sanitation, food safety, storage facilities, implementation of regulatory, statutory and safety regulations, quality of presentation etc.
- The third-party audit of the catering service to examine the quality of food, hygiene and cleanliness in the pantry car and base kitchen, which will be carried out alongside the in-house audit.
- Food safety & Hygiene audits are being conducted regularly in
Base Kitchens, both Departmental & Licensee owned, Food Plaza/Fast Food Units and Pantry Cars of IRCTC managed Trains by Third Party Auditors.
- Third Party Audit of catering services are also to be conducted at periodic intervals by independent and reputed auditing agencies accredited by NABCB (National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies) as empanelled by the zonal railways.
- Empanelment of Food Audit Agencies has been completed on Western Railway.

9. Menu and Tariff Committee

As per New Catering Policy 2017, a Menu and Tariff Committee has been constituted with following Terms of References (TOR):

- Fixation of tariff for standard menu/food items on the list of menu items given by IRCTC.
- Calculation of empirical formulae so as to calculate annual or periodical escalation w.r.t. increase in price of the components leading to preparation of meal.
- Components like ensuring hygiene, hiring of professional agencies, ingredients as per laid down norms, etc. to be taken into consideration so as to ensure quality and hygiene of food prepared.

The committee is likely to submit its report by July 31, 2017.

10. Proliferation of Train side vending

- Train side vending is a concept where a licensee staff boards the train takes order and conveys the same to the kitchen (falling before meal time) picks up the food as per order from the station and serves. Earlier when the scheme was to be implemented by zonal Rly there was problem of coordination and originating railway would not take the call (as meal time did not fall in its zone) and other ZR could not get the 'no due' for floating tender in its zone.
- As per 2017 policy TSV has been given to IRCTC. Since the grid of kitchens will be available with IRCTC, this will prove to be a good model to cater travelling passengers and will take care of problem of storage of food in train

11. CENTRALIZED CATERING GRIEVANCE AND COMPLAINT MONITORING CELL

- A Centralized Catering Services Monitoring Cell (CSMC) has been set up in Board's office having a toll free number 1800-111-321 for prompt redressal of the passenger grievances related to the catering activities for real time assistance to travelling public. Further, on the same pattern Catering Monitoring Cells have been set up at Zonal and Divisional level for daily monitoring of the catering activities.

Operation of all India helpline number 138 for rail users in the moving train. A twitter handle with the address of @IRCATERING has also been established to cater to the complaints/Suggestions. Indian Railway has been providing assistance to passengers on real time basis and prompt disposal of their grievance through social media is being taken.

12. Zero tolerance Policy

- A policy of zero tolerance towards bad quality of food served to passengers and overcharging is being followed and during last six months, 7 contracts have been terminated. 16 contractors have been blacklisted for breach of contract term in last one year
- A fine of Rs. 4.56 crores has been imposed during Jan to June'17 as compared to Rs. 4.05 crores imposed during 2016, Rs. 2.61 crores in 2015 and Rs. 1.73 crores in 2014.
- Disciplinary action has been taken against 21 railway officials in the last one year.
- More than 40,000 inspections done by railway officials to improve the catering services.

VP/ENS

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