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Food offered at places of worship to now follow FSSAI regulations Priyanka Sharma



FSSAI is trying to sensitise the management of places of worship on healthy, safe and hygienic food as around 30 crore devotees visit them daily across the nation and receive prasad.

Not just purity of mind, from now on hygiene of edible offerings at places of worship in India would also have to be immaculate. So the next time you visit any shrine, the prasad served would have an expiry date label on it following strict safety parameters, officials of the country's top food panel confirmed to Mail Today.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has brought all religious centres such as temples, gurudwaras, churches, mosques, etc, across the country under the purview of its rules.

The regulator has taken the initiative under the project Blissful Hygienic Offering to God (BHOG). It has now planned to set up the food safety standards and hygiene maintenance of the kitchens preparing prasad for God which is later distributed among devotees.

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The FSSAI has collaborated with the Association of Food Scientists and Technologist India (AFSTI), which has been involved in food safety system implementation at Mumbai's Siddhivinayak Temple and Shirdis Sai Prasadalya.

In Delhi, representatives from religious grounds such as Chattarpur Temple, Akshardham Temple, Hanuman Mandir, Iskcon Temple, Birla Mandir, Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, as well as churches and mosques were called upon for a meeting with FSSAI and have been asked to maintain hygienic kitchen and food safety standards as per the act, Pawan Agarwal, CEO of FSSAI, told Mail Today, adding that project BHOG has been expanded to all renowned places of worship nationwide.

The idea is to sensitise the management of places of worship on healthy, safe and hygienic food as around 30 crore devotees visit them daily across the nation and receive prasad as blessing of God, he said.

The FSSAI has organised training for officials of famous shrines. The food safety nodal agency has released a guidance manual to facilitate voluntary implementation of food safety at places of worship.

In Delhi, training was also held at Hanuman Mandir this month. The management of temples such as Meenakshi temple in Tamil Nadu and Somnath temple (Gujarat), Mumbai's Siddhivinayak Temple and Shirdis Sai Prasadalya have shown interest, said the official.

In Tamil Nadu, the project was implemented in 20 major temples, training around 300 food handlers, while Maharashtra conducted a training programme for more than 3,500 food handlers from 236 places of worship to create awareness and build capacity for improvement of food handling.

Agarwal informed that now authorities of all the temples, gurudwaras, churches and mosques have to ensure that packed prasad is labeled with the expiry date too.

Temples and gurudwara kitchens preparing langar and prasad have to be registered with a license. Most of the kitchens still do not have a license. Also, the management has been directed to ensure the stalls outside their campus selling packed food and prasad follow the FSSAI's directives, he said.

According to the agency's officials, previously there was no safety regulation on the prasad served at the temples and other religious places.

The shrines have to use fortified staples such as ghee, oil, rice, flour and milk while preparing prasad or langar to make it more wholesome.

In Hindu customs, offerings to God include sweets cooked in desi ghee such as laddu, burfi, bundi, etc, while at gurudwaras, meals are served to devotees three times a day in the form of langar.