

Agra halwais unhappy as govt mulls imposing standards on sweets

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Efforts are on to sour the sweet taste of mitthais by conventional halwais who add to the collective festive joy with a wide range of barfis, jamuns, jalebis and mouthwatering rasmalais.

The government agencies are mulling over formulating strict standards of sweetness, and requiring sweets manufacturers (halwais) to print a warning on the packets.

Agra mitthai (sweets) manufacturers have been warned of imminent legislation that may require them to print a warning on packets "sweets are unhealthy".

The Director of the Federation of Sweets and Namkeens Manufacturers, Mumbai, Firoz Naqvi, has held rounds of meetings with local halwais to make them aware of new restrictions that might come in force by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

Shishir Bhagat, owner of Bhagat Sweets told IANS: "Our sweets are safe and tasty. We do not make any compromise with hygiene. The negative propaganda against desi halwais has been unleashed by chocolate companies. They want their chocolates and muffins to sell."



"As far as the eating habits of Indians is concerned, no meal is complete without a sweet, even if its plain gur. Those who can afford go for ice creams these days. But our sweets using local raw materials are completely healthy and satisfying," he added.

Raj Kumar Bhagat, Vice President of the Agra Sweets Manufacturing Association, told IANS: "In view of the rising incidence of diabetes, sugar restrictions could be imposed in future. We have to remain united and prepared in advance to meet any business restricting initiative by

the government."

Due to increasing intrusion of chocolate and confectionary industry, the traditional halwais are under threat. Our mitthais are also a precious heritage, Bhagat, of the almost 300-year-old Bhagat Halwai, added.

All parts of India are known for special mitthais and these traditions have to be carried forward. The hotel industry and their chefs have already dented our business, he said.

The city of the Taj Mahal is known for its desi ghee ki mitthais, which generally have a longer shelf life. The 'Agra Petha' is as popular as the Taj Mahal.

Local mitthai shops like Bhagats, Devi Rams, Heera Lals, and dozens of others have specialised over years in introducing new shapes, colours and flavours to traditional mitthais.

"Like the 'Agra Petha', 'Mathura Peda' is equally in demand. Hathras is famous for 'Rabdi' and 'Son Papdi'. The government should help improve standards and introduce hygienic working conditions instead of imposing debatable restrictions," Surendra Sharma, President of the Braj Mandal Heritage Conservation Society said.

His argument is that people in different parts have different tastes and tolerance level. "We in Braj Mandal are particularly fond of sweets. Sweet makers of Agra go to all parts for parties. They are always in demand," he said.