



CHIN LUNG - INDIRANAGAR



CHIN LUNG BREWERY



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Bindu Gopal Rao

Bangalore's food scene has been served a rather unappetising reality check. But there may be more to the story than rotten vegetables and expired meat. As surprise inspections expose what can lurk behind polished dining rooms, they are also forcing a long-overdue question onto every diner's table: what really happens behind the kitchen door?

Between August 7 and 9, food safety officials checked 60 establishments, including three- and five-star hotels, collecting 77 samples for laboratory testing. They found violations involving food storage, labelling, expired products and unhygienic handling. Among the seizures were 640kg of meat and fish and 276kg of rotten or mould-affected vegetables, besides expired dairy and bakery products and used or non-compliant cooking oil.

Health Minister U T Khader said some establishments appeared more invested in the look of their dining areas than their kitchens. Yet the crackdown has triggered a conversation that could prove more appetising: amidst the mess, restaurants getting it right are showing that clean kitchens can still be part of Bangalore's food story.

Look beyond the plate

The diner today has a sharp eye, and rightly so. They are looking at the food, the service, the ambience and, increasingly, what is happening behind the scenes. "Restaurants are becoming much more conscious about kitchen hygiene, ingredi-

ent quality, storage, stock rotation and staff practices. Our approach is simple - if we would not want it served to us, we would not want it served to our guests. At the end of the day, trust is built one meal at a time," says Prajwal Lokesh, Managing Director of Lokesh Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.

Putting it in rather visceral terms, he says, food safety is not a quarterly meeting that sits in a calendar. "It is an everyday job. Our teams regularly check ingredients, storage conditions, labelling and shelf life. Perishables are rotated based on their expiry dates, with the 'First Expired, First Out' principle helping ensure products are used responsibly. And there is one very simple rule: when in doubt, it does not go out," he adds.

Restaurants are cleaning up kitchens,

SERVING UP TRUST

From storage temperatures to staff hygiene, restaurants are discovering that trust is built long before food reaches tables

tightening food practices and giving diners more reason to trust what lands on their plates. Amit Roy, Co-founder, THINKTANC and Director, Shilton Hospitality, says his brand has followed regular safety checks for the past 12 years, backed by SOPs that are constantly reviewed.

The company's corporate team also conducts regular audits of its kitchens to ensure procedures are followed and everything is properly maintained. From storage temperatures to equipment, particularly refrigeration units, the checks leave little room for complacency.

"It needs to be functioning properly and maintaining the required temperatures," Roy says, pointing out that any lapse could lead to product spoilage and increase the possibility of contamination.

Food safety goes much beyond having a clean kitchen. It is about the entire journey of an ingredient. Priyanka Rudrappa, Founder, Cafe Amudham, says, perishable stock management is an important part of this.

"Food safety is reviewed continuously as part of our operations, with daily checks and periodic reviews of our processes and SOPs. We follow appropriate stock rotation practices, including first-expiry, first-out wherever applicable, while checking dates and storage conditions regularly," she adds.

The raids, however, did one thing right. They brought about an emphasis on making kitchen hygiene a structured part of restaurant operations. In several eateries today, the operations include scheduled cleaning of food premises and equipment, maintaining appropriate storage temperatures, preventing cross-contamination and ensuring that food preparation areas are kept clean and organised.

"Our audit framework also covers receiving areas, storage, refrigeration, personal hygiene, pest control, waste disposal and sanitation. These systems help ensure that food safety is maintained consistently behind the scenes, which ultimately gives guests greater confidence in what reaches their table," adds Vidhatha Annamaneni, Partner & Co-Founder, Ironhill India.

Do it right

The recent food safety inspections are a necessary wake-up call for the restaurant industry. Food safety cannot be something that restaurants think about only when there is an inspection or a raid. It must be built into the everyday culture of a kitchen.

Chefs Shamanth and Keerthana, Co-Founders of Neon Castle, Mysuru, believe the way forward lies in a mix of accountability and education. "While restaurants must take responsibility for kitchen hygiene, staff practices, storage and sourcing, authorities too need to ensure consistent and transparent standards across the industry," they say, univocally.

They also call for more regular education, inspections and guidance, particularly for smaller restaurants that may not have trained food safety personnel. "The solution is a combination of accountability and education," they emphasise.

There is also a growing awareness within the restaurant industry about the importance of strengthening practices behind the scenes.

Priyesh Busetty, Co-Founder, Yuki, says food safety practices need to be embedded in everyday kitchen operations rather than treated as a response to inspections.

"Consistency is key to building trust with guests," he says.

Ingredients are checked upon receipt and stored appropriately, with perishables receiving particular attention. "The kitchen teams also follow established hygiene and food-handling practices during preparation and service, while regular checks of workstations, storage areas and inventory help keep food safety firmly rooted in daily operations," Busetty says.

For diners, food safety is an important part of the overall dining experience. Guests can look for basic indicators such as cleanliness, hygiene and how well-maintained a restaurant appears. For restaurants, being transparent and responsive to such concerns is equally important in building guest confidence.

That trust is precisely what Bangalore-based Pure & Sure hopes to strengthen with its new platform, 'Eat! Without Worry'. Perhaps, just the sort of initiative needed to restore faith in food.

The campaign takes the view that food safety should not be something people think about only when there is an inspection. "It must be an everyday habit, just like washing your hands before dinner," says Surya Shastri, Founder & Managing



AMIT ROY,
co-founder THINKTANC &
Director, Shilton Hospitality



PAJWAL LOKESH,
Managing Director, Lokesh
Hospitality PVT Ltd



PRIYANKA
RUDRAPPA,
Founder, Cafe Amudham



PRIYESH BUSETTY,
Co-Founder, Yuki



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THE NUMBERS BEHIND THE RECENT RAIDS



60
three- & five-star
hotels inspected
in city between
August 7-9



30 teams
— Deployed for
the special en-
forcement drive



77 samples
— Collected for
laboratory testing



1,089 kg
Food and other
products seized
during the drive



640 kg
Meat and fish seized



45 litres Expired
milk and curd seized



12 kg Expired
bakery products seized



276 kg Rotten/
mouldy vegetables seized



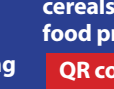
49 litres Used
cooking oil seized



67 kg
Mislabelled/expired
cereals and other
food products seized



70 kg
Sauces nearing
expiry seized
from distribu-
tion centres



QR codes — Now
mandated at
eateries for
consumer
safety com-
plaints



VIDHATHA
ANNAMANENI ,
Partner — Ironhill India

that when people know they can trust what is on their plate, they should be able to focus on enjoying it," he says.

Looking ahead

Businesses need stronger controls across the board, from sourcing, storage and temperature management to hygiene, sanitation, pest control, allergen management and traceability.

Chef Priyank Singh Chouhan, Director, Culinary & Operations, JSM Corporation, and chef for Shiro and Yoichi by Shiro, believes technology can further strengthen temperature monitoring and traceability, while regulators must take firm action against serious violations alongside educating smaller businesses.

"Ultimately, food safety is a shared responsibility," says Chouhan, adding that the recent raids across India are driving a positive behavioural shift towards stronger daily compliance and prevention. He

sees this as a positive development for the industry at large.

The renewed focus on food safety presents an opportunity for the restaurant industry to raise its standards collectively. For restaurants, the objective should go beyond simply complying with regulations or preparing for inspections.

Food safety should not be about simply passing inspections; it must be embedded in everyday operations. Diners should be able to focus on enjoying their experience, knowing that the same attention given to

the food on their plate is also being given to everything that happens behind the scenes. Restaurants need to earn that trust and customers should expect nothing less.