

Aahaar demand down, Odisha government plans to cut down plates

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BHUBANESWAR: Takers for Aahaar, the Naveen Patnaik government's much-publicised cooked meals @Rs 5 in urban areas, are on the decline. The government plans to reduce the number of meals to prevent wastage of food.

"It has come to our notice that the demand for meals in some of the Aahaar kendras(outlets) in the state has come down considerably and if the indent of meals is not reduced there may be wastage of food which is not desirable," housing and urban development secretary G Mathi Vathanan wrote to all the district collectors in a letter dated April 21 (copy with TOI).

"You are requested to immediately review the position and reduce the indent where ever required. This may be treated as extremely urgent," Mathi Vathanan wrote.

The housing and urban development secretary has also called a review meeting through video conferencing with the collectors on April 25 on indent of meals besides issues such as quality/quantity of food supplied and day to day monitoring on implementation of Aahaar, deputy secretary Narayan Sahu wrote another letter to the collectors.

There are 120-odd outlets in 73 cities and towns targeting around 60,000 people, mainly the floating population who come to these places for work. After launching the Aahaar outlets in five cities in 2015, the government expanded it to other parts last year. The Aahaar canteens

offer cooked meals comprising rice and dalma at Rs 5 at strategic locations such as bus-stands, railway stations, hospitals and collectorates. Sources said the demand is particularly less in district and sub-divisional towns where floating population is less. The total requirement per day will be known after the review two days later, the sources said.

Mathi Vathanan when contacted by TOI said the demand in Aahaar outlets is a dynamic process. "It may also go up at times. In summer the demand could be less because people prefer to stay indoors in the scorching heat while the Aahaar is served between 11 am and 3 pm. The floating population is less," he said.

While the per meal Aahaar costs come between Rs 15 to Rs 20, corporates and industrial houses fund the deficit. Apart from Aahaar, over 61.02 lakh families are covered under Re-1-per-kg subsidised uncooked rice scheme, including 36.88 lakh BPL families in various parts of the state and 5.29 lakh above poverty line (APL) families in KBK districts. Around 46 lakh school children are covered under mid-day meals.