

Aditya Thackeray assures to address the concerns of hospitality and tourism industry

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19 May 2020



The apex body of hospitality industry, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) recently hosted a webinar on COVID-19 and its impact, which saw participation of eminent leaders from the industry. The power-packed panel moderated by Jimmy Mistry, CMD Della Adventure & Resorts was also graced by Cabinet Minister of Tourism & Environment, GoM, Aditya Thackeray.

In his address, Thackeray emphasized on the need for a collaborative approach from all the stakeholders for revival and growth of the hospitality industry, which has been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic. He also focussed on preparing guidelines for sustenance and revival, and for growth of the sector in the state, post the coronavirus crisis.

The state government wants to develop Maharashtra as a tourism positive state, said Thackeray. "We have to take the state of Maharashtra ahead, pitch it to the world. I am really keen that Maharashtra will be the first to declare and deliver something for the hotel industry. We have to revive very quickly, take the sector ahead and figure out how we can work with the other sectors, he added.

Thackeray also asked the industry leaders to prepare two documents -one for the industry's sustenance plus revival and another for driving its growth after that. "This is something we have to do together, make a massive effort to get the industry back on track," he added.

He also informed that a task force has been set up for the revival and growth of the industry for medium to long-term. "We can get people across the world to come to us and stay in our hotels. We need travellers who will spend at least 36 hours in the city they visit," he opined.

Safe travel will be important, for which there will be a need to be transparent in numbers of COVID-19 cases, the way it has been so far, he said. "The way 9/11 changed travel, COVID-19 will do the same. We will have to adjust, spaces are small in Mumbai and Maharashtra. Let's put together a group and move ahead unitedly as a team," he added.

Some of the problems faced by the members of the hotel and restaurant industry were presented to the Minister including the need for liquidity and working capital. Also shared were aspects that could be easily implemented by the state government such as exemption in electricity duty, which is charged at 21 percent, property tax waiver for 6-9 months with the caveat that landlords should pass it on to the establishments, and facilitating working capital requirements. Besides, issues such as the increased excise license fees that are payable upfront at this critical time when the industry has so many cash flow problems were highlighted along with a request that subsidies available to the manufacturing sector should be extended to hotels and restaurants so that they can do borrowing to sustain.