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# Maha Allows Hotels to Reopen from July 8

Issues detailed guidelines for resumption of operations; allows only 33% occupancy

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**New Delhi:** The Maharashtra government has allowed hotels and other accommodation providers to resume operations with restricted entry and at 33% capacity outside containment areas from Wednesday, but industry insiders said small, boutique hotels were likely to stay shut given their limited number of rooms, new protocols, and costs of doing business.

The order issued on Monday allows restaurants in hotels to operate for resident guests with social-distancing norms but makes no mention of standalone restaurants, and operators said they will stay shut.

Chains like Indian Hotels Company and Lemon Tree have already been operating some hotels in cities like Mumbai and Pune providing accommodation for medical staff and quarantining of asymptomatic travellers.

Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India vice president Gurbaxish Singh Kohli said he supported the go ahead to operate but did not understand the 33% capacity limit. "People coming to a hotel are living within the confines of a room. You can't get more socially distant than that. Probably this is phase one and within the next few weeks they would increase the capacity. We also do not understand why restaurants have not been allowed to operate. If people require places to stay, they would also require places to eat," he said.

Dilip Datwani, the president of the Hotel and Restaurant Association of Western India, said the 33% capacity limit for small hotels made no sense. "If a hotel has 19-20 keys,

and you are asking him to operate six rooms, the economics do not work; 50% capacity would have been understandable ... there are staff and electricity costs. The order is not viable for smaller hotels," he said.

National Restaurant Association of India president Anurag Katriar said if the state, based on the feedback of the domain experts, felt it was not safe to dine out now, restaurants would abide by it.

"The Union Ministry of Home Affairs had permitted states to take a call, so if they feel it is not safe, it is not safe. What can we do," he said.

The order issued on Monday by chief secretary Sanjay Kumar said hotels and other hospitality units that were being used for

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quarantine facilities would continue to be used so unless decided otherwise by the district or municipal administration. "Similarly, some part/whole of the balance unused capacity (67%) can also be used for quarantine facility by district/municipal administration," the chief secretary said in the order.

Dipak Haksar, an advisor to the Confederation of Indian Industry's national committee on tourism and the hospitality, said the industry body welcomed Maharashtra's decision on reopening hotels. "We are hopeful that soon the limit of 33% occupancy will also be removed," he said.

The standard operating procedures include ensuring proper crowd management in the hotel as well as outside premises like parking lots, contactless processes like digital payments for both check-ins and check-outs, compulsory use of the Aarogya Setu app, and leaving rooms unoccupied for at least 24 hours after each client stay following sanitisation.

— **Krishna Kumar** in Mumbai contributed to this story