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Dalhousie street-food vendors get hygiene training to ensure post-pandemic biz boost

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Kolkata: Two hundred and fifty street food vendors who operate in the Dalhousie Square locality underwent a four-day quality and safety training to raise the bar and inspire confidence among a larger customer base. 'Office para', as the Dalhousie-Esplanade locality is popularly known, offers a wide variety of street food that includes snacks, like jhalmuri, kachauri, jalebi, tele bhaja, chaat, dahi vada, chilla and momo, meals, like noodles, chilli chicken, idli-dosa, litti-chokha, roti-tadka and biryani.

While the food is tasty and served hot, there have been concerns over hygiene and quality among a section of people due to the shabbiness of the stalls and the way they conduct business.

Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry (BCC&I), one of the country's oldest business chambers that has been in existence since 1833 and has been witness to the evolution of Dalhousie Square over two centuries, decided to step in last year after film-maker Arindam Sil, the chairperson of the film music and media committee at the chamber, poin-

FOOD STREETS IN OFFICE PARA

India Exchange Place |
Netaji Subhas Road | Fairlie
Place | RN Mukherjee Road |
Bankshal Court | Clive Row

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

- ▶ There are around **300-350** street-food vendors in Dalhousie
- ▶ Of them, **60%** have returned to work
- ▶ Around **70%** of street-food business has recovered



Street food vendors at the training programme

ted out that the heritage zone of Dalhousie could be promoted as a cultural and street food hub after office hours, particularly during weekends. But before that, the vendors there needed a complete makeover.

"We have grand plans to position Dalhousie Square on the street food

map of India. The pandemic has upset the plans, but we have conducted the second training and hope to hold a food carnival around December if the situation remains under control," said Sil.

Exide Industries, that has adopted the programme as a CSR initiative, is also keen to see the heritage Dalhousie

area emerge as a cultural and street food hub. "The office para goes into slumber after dusk. It can then then into a carnival street with sumptuous street food served against the backdrop of illuminated colonial heritage buildings. One can organize heritage walks and even a son et lumière. After all, the area is replete with history and was once the seat of power in India," said Exide vice-president Jitendra Kumar.

While 150 vendors had been trained in February 2020, the programme enlisted 250 vendors this year and trained them on how to conduct business in a hygienic and safe manner. "The training was on hygiene, food safety, presentation, culinary skills, fire safety waste management and continued focus on sanitisation, given the pandemic," said BCC&I deputy director Sukanya Bose.

Meena Devi, who serves litti-chokha to 200-250 customers daily on weekdays, said the workshop helped her understand the concerns of customers. "Wearing an apron and polythene gloves while serving and washing the utensils with hot water and soap can make a lot of difference," she said.