

CATERING SERVICES IN INDIAN RAILWAYS

[Action Taken by the Government on the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee contained in their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha)]

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS

**COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
(2024-25)**

THIRTEENTH REPORT
EIGHTEENTH LOK SABHA



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

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COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Presented to Lok Sabha on: 19-03-2025

Laid in Rajya Sabha on: 19-03-2025

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

March, 2025/ Phalguna, 1946 (Saka)

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- I. Minutes of the sitting of the Committee on Public Account (2024-25) held on 12.02.2025.
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COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(2024-25)

Shri K. C. Venugopal - Chairperson

MEMBERS

LOK SABHA

2. Shri T. R. Baalu
3. Dr. Nishikant Dubey
4. Shri Jagdambika Pal
5. Shri Jai Parkash
6. Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad
7. Shri C. M. Ramesh
8. Shri Magunta Sreenivasulu Reddy
9. Prof. Sougata Ray
10. Smt. Aparajita Sarangi
11. Dr. Amar Singh
12. Shri Tejasvi Surya
13. Shri Anurag Singh Thakur
14. Shri Balashowry Vallabhaneni
15. Shri Dharmendra Yadav

RAJYA SABHA

16. Shri Ashokrao Shankarrao Chavan
17. Shri Shaktisinh Gohil
18. Dr. K. Laxman
19. Shri Praful Patel
20. Shri Sukhendu Sekhar Ray
21. Shri Tiruchi Siva
22. Shri Sudhanshu Trivedi

Secretariat

1. Dr. Sanjeev Sharma - Joint Secretary
2. Shri Muraleedharan. P - Director
3. Shri Atul Bhawe - Deputy Secretary

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairperson, Committee on Public Accounts (2024-25) having been authorised by the Committee, do present this Thirteenth Report (18th Lok Sabha) on Action Taken by the Government on the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee contained in their One Hundred and Fifteenth Report (17th Lok Sabha) on “Catering Services in Indian Railways” relating to the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board).

2. The One Hundred and Fifteenth Report was presented to Lok Sabha/laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 8th February, 2024. The Committee considered the draft Action Taken Report on the subject and adopted the same at their sitting held on 12th February, 2025. Minutes of the Sitting of the Committee form appendix to the Report.

3. For facility of reference and convenience, the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee have been printed in **bold** in the body of the Report.

4. The Committee place on record their appreciation of the assistance rendered to them in the matter by the Committee Secretariat and the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

5. An analysis of the action taken by the Government on the Observations/Recommendations contained in the 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha) is given at Appendix-II

NEW DELHI:
12 February, 2025
23 Magha, 1946 (*Saka*)

K. C. VENUGOPAL
Chairperson,
Public Accounts Committee

CHAPTER I

REPORT

This Report of the Committee on Public Accounts deals with the Action Taken by the Government on the Observations and Recommendations of the Committee contained in their One Hundred and Fifteenth Report (Seventeenth Lok Sabha) on “Catering Services in Indian Railways” relating to the Ministry of Railways, Railway Board.”

2. The One Hundred and Fifteenth Report, which was presented to Lok Sabha and laid on the Table of Rajya Sabha on 08 February, 2024, contained 11 Observations/Recommendations. The Action Taken Notes on all the Observations /Recommendations have been received from the Ministry of Railways (Railway Board) and are categorized as under:

- (i) Observations/Recommendations which have been accepted by the Government:

Para No. 06,07,08,09,10 & 11

Total: 06
Chapter: II

- (ii) Observations /Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the replies received from the Government:

Para No.: NIL

Total: nil
Chapter: III

- (iii) Observations /Recommendations in respect of which replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and which require reiteration:

Para No.: 01,02,03,04 & 05

Total: 05
Chapter: IV

- (iv) Observations /Recommendations in respect of which Government have furnished interim replies /no replies:
Para No.: NIL

Total: nil
Chapter: V

3. The Committee noted that the Indian Railways (IR) carries about 22.21 million passengers per day. Passenger traffic of this magnitude needs the services of a well-managed catering and vending system for supply of healthy and wholesome food at reasonable prices. In Indian Railways, catering services are provided by IR departmentally, through Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) and by engaging outside agencies at stations and in trains. The Audit Report includes the assessment of adequacy and availability of good quality and hygienic food to railway passengers at affordable rates. Audit analysis related to management of contracts awarded for providing catering services at stations and in trains for ensuring good quality catering services was also included in this Report. Audit also conducted joint inspection along with the Railway personal to assess and check the adequacy and availability of catering services at stations and in trains.

Indian Railways has changed its catering policy three times since 2005. Frequent change in catering policy and consequent transfer of responsibility to manage catering units from railways to IRCTC and back, have created a state of uncertainty in management of catering services provided to the passengers over the years. As per the new policy (issued in February 2017), a number of catering activities which were assigned to IRCTC in 2005 policy and then transferred to Zonal Railways in 2010 policy, have now been assigned back to IRCTC. However, the concerns of quality, hygiene, affordability and availability of food to passengers are needed to be adequately addressed. Also, due to frequent policy changes, IR could not take effective steps to bridge the gap to provide necessary infrastructure in terms of base kitchens, Static Catering Units, Trains Side Vending arrangements and Automatic Vending Machines etc.

Zonal Railways were required to prepare a Master Plan (Blue Print) of catering services to be provided at each station and onboard trains. Audit noticed that Blue Print for provision of catering services was not prepared in seven Zonal Railways (East Central, Eastern, Northeast Frontier, North Western, South Eastern, South Western and East Coast Railways). The Zonal Railways did not ensure provision of pantry cars in a number of long distance trains. During joint inspection, it was seen that in nine trains having a run of more than 24 hours, no pantry car was provided. Alternative services through train side vending and/or base kitchens were also not provided in some of the trains checked in audit. No Train Side Vending Services were provided by North Central, South East Central and Southern Railways for the trains which run for more than 12 hours during the day time. Absence of pantry cars in long distance trains and Train Side Vending Services attracts unauthorized vendors in trains and sale of unhygienic and unhealthy food products.

4. The Committee had accordingly given their observations / Recommendations in the 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha). The gist of important Observations /Recommendations as contained in the Report as given as under:-

- *The Committee while noting that 15 Kitchen Units were planned to be upgraded and 9 Green Field Base Kitchens were to be set up by IRCTC, desired to be apprised of the present status of all Kitchen Units envisioned to be upgraded; Green Field Base Kitchens to be set up and also the status of the sub-judice cases.*
- *The Committee while noting that the Blue Print had been prepared by all the 16 zonal railways and it was under implementation desired to be apprised of the reasons for the delay in the preparing a Blue Print of catering services by the seven zonal railways.*
- *The Committee recommended that the Ministry undertake a survey on the present number of trains running with ICF coaches and formulate a cost effective feasible plan to expeditiously replace the ICF coaches with LHB coaches without adversely impacting the functioning of the Indian*

Railways and its catering services. The Committee also desired to be apprised of the present status in this regard.

- *The Committee desired to be apprised of details of setting up base kitchens inside the railway premises and further desire that a review of the services rendered through these kitchens may be undertaken by the Ministry to ascertain their effectiveness in maintaining quality, hygiene and cleanliness.*
- *To ensure that no unauthorized vendors are allowed on Indian railways, the Committee recommended that regular surprise inspections of catering services provided in trains/ stations may be undertaken and the report thereof uploaded immediately on an online portal for enabling the senior officers to take immediate remedial action against those found responsible.*
- *The Committee hoped that necessary action had been taken by the Ministry and IRCTC to ensure 100% compliance and mandatory adherence to ISO 22000 and FSSAI certification for all existing catering units in Indian Railways.*
- *The Committee were optimistic that a mechanism had since been put in place and responsibilities had been clearly specified to ensure constant communication and seamless flow of information amongst IRCTC and Zonal Railways in their endeavor towards improving the quality of catering service to passengers of Indian Railways.*
- *The Committee, therefore desired to be apprised of the subsequent follow-up measures undertaken and upgrades initiated by the Indian Railways and IRCTC on the basis of various surveys conducted by the third party and also desired to be apprised of the suggestions on which action had not been taken/pending till date.*
- *The Committee also desired that a mechanism for real time reporting/submission and resolution of passenger complaints/grievances to be put in place so as to ensure that defective food items could immediately be removed from the supply chain and the unauthorized and erring vendors blacklisted.*

- *The Committee while noting that the mandate of IRCTC also included promoting domestic and international tourism through development of budget hotels, special tour packages etc., recommended that the O/o C&AG may undertake a fresh audit on the performance of IRCTC in providing various services, particularly in premium/luxury trains including Maharajas' Express.*

5. The Action Taken Replies furnished by the Ministry of Railways in respect of all the Observations /Recommendations of the Committee as contained in their One Hundred and Fifteenth Report (17th Lok Sabha) have been reproduced in the relevant chapters of this Report. The Committee will now deal with the action taken by the Government on some of their Observations /Recommendations made in their One Hundred and Fifteenth Report (17th Lok Sabha), which need reiteration or merit comments.

The Committee desire that the Ministry of Railways to furnish Action Taken Notes in respect of Observations /Recommendations contained in Chapter-I of this Report within 3 months of its presentation to the House.

6. *The Committee in their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha) had recommended as follows:-*

“It is apparent for the Committee to see that as per the new policy, a number of catering activities which were assigned to IRCTC as per 2005 policy and then transferred to Zonal Railways as per 2010 policy, were assigned back to IRCTC. The Committee note that for implementation of Catering Policy 2017, transfer of catering units to IRCTC has already been completed with the exception of one mobile unit and 13 static units which were sub-judice. The Committee while noting that 15 Kitchen Units were planned to be upgraded and 9 Green Field Base Kitchens were to be set up by IRCTC, desire to be apprised of the present status of all Kitchen Units envisioned to be upgraded; Green Field Base Kitchens to be set up and also the status of the sub-judice cases. The Committee hope that Ministry and IRCTC have formulated plans to facilitate time bound further upgradation of all catering units in line with the emerging requirements and desire to be apprised of any plans for setting up additional base kitchens, catering units and deadline for completion of such projects.”

7. The Ministry of Railways in their Action Taken Reply have stated as under:-

“Transfer of catering units from Zonal Railways to IRCTC as mandated in Catering Policy 2017 has been completed over all Zonal Railways. Upgradation/Setting up/development of Kitchens is an ongoing process. So far, 48 Kitchen Units including Base Kitchens have been upgraded/developed by IRCTC from where meals are being supplied in trains. The number and location of Kitchens is decided as per the requirement of meals and route of the train. The supply of meals on trains is being ensured from the designated kitchen units.”

8. The vetting comments of Audit are as follows:-

“MoR has not furnished the details sought by the PAC regarding the status of all kitchen units envisioned to be upgraded, green field base kitchens to be set up, and the status of sub-judice cases. The plans for setting up additional base kitchens, or catering units and the deadline for completing such projects were also not furnished.”

9. The Ministry of Railways in their response to the Audit comments have further stated as under:-

“It is reiterated that transfer of catering units from Zonal Railways to IRCTC as mandated in Catering Policy 2017 has been completed. The number and location of Kitchens is decided as per the requirement of meals and route of the train and accordingly supply of meals on trains is being ensured from the designated kitchens. Upgradation/Setting up/development of Kitchens is an ongoing process and so far, 177 Base Kitchens have been commissioned.”

10. The Committee in para (1) of their 115th Report (17 Lok Sabha), while taking cognizance of the fact that 15 Kitchen Units were planned to be upgraded and 9 Green Field Base Kitchens were to be set up by IRCTC, sought present status of all Kitchen Units envisioned to be upgraded; Green Field Base Kitchens to be set up and also the status of the sub-judice cases. The Committee are not satisfied with the reply of the Ministry of Railways. The reply does not specifically mention

about the status of all kitchen units envisioned to be upgraded, green field base kitchens to be set up and also the status of sub-judice cases.

Further, the Committee also desire to be apprised of the plans for setting up of additional base kitchens, or catering units and the deadline for completing such projects. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and desire to be apprised of the specific details of the status of kitchen units envisioned to be upgraded green field base kitchens to be set up and also the status of sub-judice cases.

11. *The Committee in their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha) had recommended as follows:-*

“The Committee note that Zonal Railways were required to prepare a Master Plan (Blue Print) of catering services to be provided at each station and onboard trains. The Committee also note that the Blue Print for provision of catering services in seven Zonal Railways (East Central, Eastern, Northeast Frontier, North Western, South Eastern, South Western and East Coast Railways) were prepared only after the Audit pointed out the same and that many zonal Railways were not reviewing and updating the plan periodically. The Committee while noting that the Blue Print has now been prepared by all the 16 zonal railways and it is under implementation desire to be apprised of the reasons for the delay in the preparing a Blue Print of catering services by the seven zonal railways. The Committee are optimistic that necessary instructions have been issued to all zonal railways for undertaking periodic review based on which updation of the Master Plan may be effected. The Committee while opining that proper planning is an integral part of effective functioning in any enterprise recommend that the Ministry, IRCTC and Concerned zonal railways must undertake a joint review of the functioning vis-à-vis the blue prints prepared by each zonal railway every five years for better monitoring of the same.”

[Recommendation Para No. 2]

12. The Ministry of Railways in their Action Taken Reply have stated as under:-

“As per extant policy, a comprehensive blue print for the catering units at each station is prepared by Railways taking into consideration that adequate facilities are available to cater to the needs of traveling passengers. Station wise Master Plans/ Blue prints have been

prepared by all Zonal Railways as envisaged in Catering Policy 2017. These Master Plans/ Blueprints for each station is prepared by Zonal Railways, in coordination with Divisions and IRCTC ensuring that adequate catering services are available to the passengers.”

13. The vetted comments of Audit are as under:

“MoR has not furnished any action taken on the recommendation of PAC to ensure that the Ministry, IRCTC, and concerned zonal railways must undertake a joint review of the functioning vis-à- vis the blueprints prepared by each zonal railway every five years for better monitoring of the same.”

14. In their further comments to the said Audit observation, the Ministry replied as under:

“Station wise Master Plans/Blue Prints have been prepared by all Zonal Railways as envisaged in Catering Policy 2017. These Master Plans/Blueprints for each station are prepared by Zonal Railways, in coordination with Divisions and IRCTC ensuring that adequate catering services are available to the passengers. Review of Master Plan/Blueprint for stations is undertaken as and when necessitated due to passenger and operational requirements.”

15. In para 2 of their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha), the Committee while observing that proper planning is an integral part of effective functioning in any enterprise recommend that the Ministry, IRCTC and Concerned zonal railways must undertake joint review of the functioning *vis-à- vis* the blue prints prepared by each zonal railway every five years for better monitoring of the same. The Committee regret to note from the reply of the Ministry appears to be evasive to the extent that there is no mention about undertaking joint review meetings of the functioning *vis –a-vis* the blueprints prepared by each zonal railway every five years.

The Ministry should establish an effective and robust system of review meeting(s) to periodically monitor the functioning of catering services. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and desire that the Ministry may take prompt and timely remedial action on their observations and apprise them within three months of the presentation of the Report.

16. The Committee in their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha) had recommended as follows:-

“The Committee further note that as per the Catering Policy 2010, mobile catering services were to be provided with suitable design pantry cars and equipment of state-of-art technology. There was to be progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment. The Committee, however note that the policy of progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment in pantry cars to avoid the occurrence of fire accidents specially in running trains was not followed while manufacturing the pantry cars in Integral Coach Factory, Perambur. In this regard specifically, the Committee find that a total of 103 pantry cars were manufactured by Integral Coach Factory during April 2011 to March 2016 at a total cost of RS. 111.94 crore with provision for centralized LPG cylinders with open flames, instead of providing electric power equipment panel counters etc. and the same were distributed to all the Zonal Railways. Clarifying its position, the Ministry submitted that it is technically not feasible to retrofit an existing Integral Coach Factory (ICF) Pantry car with electric power equipment due to heavy power demand of the electrical equipment and hence switchover to Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches from ICF is the only viable option.

The Committee also note that on 10.10.2018, a Joint Procedure Order (JPO) for attachment of Pantry Cars was issued entailing provisions to switch over from flamed cooking with gas burner in Pantry Cars to flameless cooking by using the electrical equipment provided in the re-designed/modified Pantry Cars. The Committee further note that production of ICF pantry cars has been discontinued w.e.f 01.04.2018. Hence, LHB pantry cars with electric power equipment will only be manufactured henceforth on Indian Railway and cooking with gas burners will be phased out in due course of time.

The Committee are unable to comprehend the reasons as to why 103 pantry cars were manufactured by Integral –Coach Factory, during April, 2011 to March 2016 with provision- for centralized-LPG cylinders with open flame instead of providing electric power equipment panel counters despite the provision in Catering Policy 2010 for progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power

equipment in pantry cars. The Committee are hopeful that the Ministry must have had conducted an internal inquiry to find out the reasons for continuing the production of gas based pantry cars till March 2016 and appropriate action taken thereon. Noting that as of April, 2018, the Ministry had taken the decision to stop the production of ICF coaches and manufacture only LHB pantry cars with electric power equipment and phase out the ICF coaches, the Committee in no uncertain words recommend that the Ministry need to prioritize phasing out the ICF coaches and stocks on its pre- decided trajectory. The Committee recommend that the Ministry undertake a survey on the present number of trains running with ICF coaches and formulate a cost effective feasible plan to expeditiously replace the ICF coaches with LHB coaches without adversely impacting the functioning of the Indian Railways and its catering services. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the present status in this regard.”

[Recommendation Para No. 3]

17. The Ministry of Railways in their Action Taken Reply have stated as under:

“Indian Railways is committed to flameless cooking through electric power equipment in pantry cars. From April 2018 onwards, only LHB pantry cars with electrical equipment are being manufactured. As such switchover from flame based pantry in existing ICF pantries to flameless LHB pantries is being achieved progressively as envisaged in the extant policy while ensuring availability of adequate catering facilities to passengers in trains.”

18. The vetted comments of Audit are as under:

“The reply of MoR is silent on the observation of the committee regarding conducting an internal inquiry to find out the reasons for continuing the production of gas based pantry cars till March 2016 and appropriate action taken thereon. MoR has also not furnished action taken on the recommendation of the PAC to undertake a survey on the present number of trains running with ICF coaches and formulate a cost-effective feasible plan expeditiously replace the ICF coaches with LHB coaches without adversely impacting the functioning of the Indian Railways and its catering services.”

19. In response to the vetted comments of Audit, the Ministry replied as under:

“Indian Railways is committed to flameless cooking through electric power equipment in pantry cars. From April 2018 onwards, only LHB pantry cars with electrical equipment are being manufactured. Production of ICF pantry during the period from 2011 to 2016 continued to ensure provision of uninterrupted catering services to passengers during the transition period. As such, switchover from flame based pantry in existing ICF pantries to flameless LHB pantries is being achieved progressively as envisaged in the extant policy.

As regards trains running with ICF coaches, presently 746 ICF rakes are being utilised for passenger carrying train operations and Indian Railways have been able to convert a total of 1241 ICF rakes into LHB. Further, conversion of ICF rakes into LHB rakes is a continuous process on Indian Railways being undertaken in a phased manner, based on availability of rolling stock.”

20. In para 3 of their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha), the Committee had expressed its concern over the fact that the policy of progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment in pantry cars to avoid the occurrence of fire accidents specially in running trains was not followed while manufacturing the pantry cars in Integral Coach Factory, Perambur.

The Committee are further unable to comprehend the reasons as to why 103 pantry cars were manufactured by Integral –Coach Factory, during April, 2011 to March 2016 with provision- for centralized-LPG cylinders with open flame instead of providing electric power equipment panel counters despite the provision in Catering Policy 2010 for progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment in pantry cars. The Committee are also appalled to note the silence of the Ministry regarding conducting an internal inquiry to find out the reasons for continuing the production of gas based pantry cars till March 2016.

The Committee were further dismayed to note that the reply of the Ministry is silent on the aspect of undertaking a survey on the present

number of trains running with ICF coaches and formulate a cost-effective feasible plan to expeditiously replace the ICF Coaches with LHB coaches without adversely impacting the functioning of the Indian Railways and its catering services. The Committee, therefore, reiterate their earlier recommendation and desire the Ministry to initiate independent investigation into the matter and also take penal action against the officials of the Ministry/IRCTC for violating the directions. The Committee desire that the Ministry may directly oversee the survey and ensure timebound replacement of ICF coaches with LHB coaches without impacting the catering services and passenger amenities.

21. The Committee in their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha) had recommended as follows:-

“The Committee learn that in the new Catering Policy 2017, the responsibility of setting up and operation of base kitchens had been given to IRCTC and that base kitchens were to be set up in railway premises to monitor and control the quality and hygiene of food served in trains and a business plan in this regard was to be submitted within 30 days of issue of the policy. As per Audit, only 16 base kitchens were inside the railway premises whereas 115 base kitchens were located outside the railway premises and were not subjected to quality check.

As the available base kitchens were not adequate to cater to the needs of the trains, food was being procured by licensee from outside instead of being prepared in the base kitchens. Further, meals were picked up from outside base kitchens in respect of 128 trains of seven Zonal Railways. In the opinion of the Committee, since food was being procured by licensee from outside, they were evidently not subjected to regular and constant quality checks and thus, could not register an assurance for quality, hygiene and cleanliness. The Committee note that the Business Plan submitted by IRCTC was not in accordance with Catering Policy 2017 and, therefore, a revised Business Plan’ was submitted. The Committee are hopeful that the Ministry have ensured that necessary provisions for quality, hygiene and- cleanliness checks and for expeditious setting up of sufficient base kitchens and catering units within a time frame have been incorporated in the revised Business Plan.

The Committee desire to be apprised of details of setting up base kitchens inside the railway premises and further desire that a review of the services rendered through these kitchens may be undertaken by the Ministry to ascertain their effectiveness in maintaining quality, hygiene and cleanliness.”

[Recommendation (Para No. 4)]

22. The Ministry of Railways in their Action Taken Reply have stated as under:-

In an endeavour to ensure good quality and hygienic food production, following measures are under implementation:

- Supply of meals in trains from the designated Base Kitchens.
- Upgradation /development of Base Kitchen /Kitchen Units are being undertaken
- CCTV Cameras are being installed in upgraded Base Kitchens /Kitchen Units for better monitoring of food preparation.
- QR codes have been introduced on food packets enabling display of details like name of kitchen, date of packaging, expiry date etc.
- Third Party Audit is done to examine hygiene and cleanliness in Pantry Cars and Kitchen Units. Customer satisfaction survey is also conducted.
- To ensure compliance of Food Safety Norms, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certification from Designated Food Safety Officers of each catering unit has been made mandatory.
- Food Safety Supervisors are being deployed at Kitchen Units to monitor food safety and hygienic practices.
- Regular and surprise inspections are conducted by Railway/IRCTC officials including Food Safety Officers.

23. The vetted comments of Audit are as under:

“The reply of MoR does not address the observation of the committee regarding incorporating necessary provisions for quality, hygiene and cleanliness checks and for expeditious setting up of sufficient base kitchens and catering units within a time frame in the revised Business Plan.

MoR has also not furnished the details of setting up base kitchens inside the railway premises.”

24. In response to the vetted comments of Audit, the Ministry replied as under:

Measures taken for ensuring quality, hygiene and cleanliness have been intimated in the earlier replies which are reiterated as under:

- Supply of meals in trains from the designated Base Kitchens.
- Setting up /development of Base Kitchen /Kitchen Units are being undertaken as per the laid down standards.
- CCTV Cameras are being installed in upgraded Base Kitchens /Kitchen Units for better monitoring of food preparation.
- QR codes have been introduced on food packets enabling display of details like name of kitchen, date of packaging, expiry date etc.
- Third Party Audit is done to examine hygiene and cleanliness in Pantry Cars and Kitchen Units. Customer satisfaction survey is also conducted.
- To ensure compliance of Food Safety Norms, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certification from Designated Food Safety Officers of each catering unit has been made mandatory.

It is further intimated that supply of meals on trains is being ensured from the designated kitchens. The number and location of Base Kitchens are decided as per the requirement of meals and route of the trains. Setting up/development of Kitchens is an ongoing process and so far, 177 Base Kitchens have been commissioned.

25. The Committee noted that the Business Plan submitted by IRCTC was not in accordance with Catering Policy 2017 and, therefore, recommended that a revised Business Plan' may be submitted. The Committee also impressed upon the Ministry to ensure that necessary provisions for quality, hygiene and- cleanliness checks and for expeditious setting up of sufficient base kitchens and catering units within a time frame ought to be incorporated in the revised Business Plan.

The Committee are dismayed to note that the Ministry has failed to address the issue regarding incorporating necessary provisions of quality, hygiene and cleanliness checks and for expeditious setting of sufficient base kitchens and catering units inside railway premises within a timeframe in the revised Business Plan. The Committee are also unhappy to note that the Ministry has not furnished details of setting up of base kitchens inside the railway premises. The Committee would like to be apprised of the Action Taken by the Railways in this regard within the stipulated timeframe. The Committee are of the opinion that Railways need to draw up a revised Business Plan with identified milestones to ensure high level of quality, hygiene and cleanliness at all times.

In the opinion of the Committee, since food was being procured by licensee from outside, they were evidently not subjected to regular and constant quality checks and thus, could not register an assurance for quality. The Committee are of the firm opinion that Railway must not lose sight of the big picture while executing their duty to the nation. Cleanliness and hygiene on Indian Railway should be manifested as a top priority in the Business Plan that the Railways undertake while catering to the heterogeneous crowd. The Committee strongly recommend that the Ministry displays enhanced enthusiasm towards this aspect and lead by example.

Moreover, till such time base kitchens are established inside railway premises, the Ministry must ensure that not only regular monitoring is done but also the functionary and supervisory authorities should not be the same while engaging private parties/vendors. Thus, it is necessary that the terms and conditions of the catering contracts bind the contractors to adhere to the basic tenets of cleanliness failing which penalty ought to be levied.

The Committee have noted that there has been manifold surge in the number of passengers using railways as their mode of transportation. The Committee are not oblivious to the fact that catering services is an integral part of passengers amenities and is directly proportional to the infrastructure and the passenger footfall. The Committee note with concern that since the oversight / review of outsourcing in catering units (base kitchens) is not feasible till they are established in the railway premises, the Committee intend to know

as to what measures have been adopted by the Ministry to ensure that proper review of licensee from outside is undertaken to achieve the desired objectives.

The Committee while reiterating their earlier recommendations urge the Ministry to apprise the Committee of the action taken in this regard at the earliest.

26. The Committee in their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha) had recommended as follows:-

“The Committee observe that some Zonal Railways had not ensured provision of pantry cars in a number of long distance trains. They find that in nine trains having a run of more than 24 hours, no pantry car was provided. Moreover, alternative services through Train Side Vending (TSV) and/or base kitchens were also not provided in some of the trains. The Committee note that the absence of pantry cars in long distance trains and Train Side Vending Services invariably attracts unauthorized vendors in trains which results in not only sale of unhygienic and unhealthy food products but also poses a safety threat for the passengers. The Committee note from the reply of the Ministry that in order to ensure provision of adequate catering services for passengers, Zonal Railways have been advised to grant Platform Vending Permissions to Static Catering Units.

While recommending that due diligence may be taken in awarding Platform Vending Permissions to Static Catering Units to ensure engagement of vendors with excellent credentials and track record, the Committee seek to be apprised of the status of granting Platform Vending Permission to Static Catering Units. Here, the Committee recommend that provision of adequate and quality food to passengers in every train should be accorded top most priority and necessary steps taken to ensure efficient and adequate catering service. It goes here without saying that these services are availed by the passengers on ‘user basis’ and IRCTC is only managing the services on behalf of the passengers. The Committee are also hopeful that a contingency plan has also been put in place for provision of food and water to passengers in the event of inordinate delays, accidents etc. To ensure that no unauthorized vendors are allowed on Indian railways, the Committee recommend that regular

surprise inspections of catering services provided in trains/ stations may be undertaken and the report thereof uploaded immediately on an online portal for enabling the senior officers to take immediate remedial action against those found responsible.

[Recommendation (Para No. 5)]

27. The Ministry of Railways in their Action Taken Reply have stated as under:-

“Attachment of Pantry car in trains depends upon various factors such as availability of pantry car, operational feasibility, priority of train, duration of journey etc. However, provision of catering services to passengers travelling by trains not having pantry car is ensured through adequate number of static catering units at en route stations, Train Side Vending, E-Catering facilities, Platform Vending Services etc. As on 31.12.2023, 544 pairs of trains covering premium trains and long distance Mail/Express trains are provided with pantry car facility. In addition, 692 pairs of Mail/Express Trains are provided with Train Side Vending (TSV) services with meals pick up from en route stations. E-catering facility is available at 379 stations.

Further it is stated that continuous and ongoing efforts are made to check on unauthorized vending on trains and platforms with the help of RPF. Punitive actions are accordingly taken against the unauthorized vendors/hawkers under Section 144 of Indian Railway Act 1989 which includes imprisonment, fine or both.

Drives against unauthorized vending are organized by RPF and Commercial Staff constantly to check this menace.”

28. The vetted comments of Audit are as under:

“MoR has not furnished action taken on online uploading of the reports based on surprise inspections of the catering services.”

29. In response to the vetted comments of Audit, the Ministry replied as under:

“Special drives, regular and surprise inspections of catering services provided in trains/stations are undertaken. Necessary punitive actions are taken against the instances of unauthorized vending/any other deficiency in services noticed during the drive/inspection. The observations /outcomes /findings are also shared with/communicated to the concerned officials for taking further corrective measures.”

30. In para 5 of their 115th Report (17th Lok Sabha), the Committee noted that the absence of pantry cars in long distance trains and Train Side Vending Services invariably attracts unauthorized vendors in trains which results in not only sale of unhygienic and unhealthy food products but also poses a safety threat for the passengers. To ensure that no unauthorized vendors are allowed on Indian railways, the Committee recommended that regular surprise inspections of catering services provided in trains/ stations may be undertaken and the report thereof uploaded immediately on an online portal for enabling the senior officers to take immediate remedial action against those found responsible. The Committee are astonished to note that Railways are yet to adopt any standard operating procedures or performance indicators to upload reports based on surprise inspections of the catering services on the online portal. The Committee recommend that there should be periodic surprise checks by the senior officers and it should be video recorded to clearly keep a track record of the cleanliness levels in the pantry cars / base kitchens/green field kitchens and same pattern should be vigorously followed by all the zones.

In this connections, the Committee desire that a Task Force ought to be constituted to address the issues of cleanliness, gadgets and equipment in base kitchen. Moreover, the Ministry must bring out a status report on the subject of execution of the earlier recommendations especially the number of cases of action taken in each Railway Zone in respect of violations notified during surprise inspections so far within three months of presentation of this report.

CHAPTER - II
OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN
ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT
Observation / Recommendation

As per Clause 4 of the Catering Policy 2010, all major catering units were required to obtain ISO 22000 certification. Audit found that only 1.07 percent of major units managed by Zonal Railways and 70 percent of units managed by IRCTC were ISO 22000 certified as on 31 March 2016 and ISO certification had not been updated in 42 IRCTC units. The Committee note from the reply of the Ministry that Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) guidelines are covered under Schedule IV of FSSAI Regulations 2011 and all catering units in Indian Railway/IRCTC have FSSAI certification. More than 70% of major catering units of IRCTC (Food Plazas and Fast Food Units) are ISO 22000 certified as well as registered with FSSAI. The Committee are unable to understand as to why ISO 22000 and FSSAI certification of all catering units of Indian Railways and IRCTC was not made mandatory before engaging them. The Committee are hopeful that necessary action has been taken by the Ministry and IRCTC to ensure 100% compliance and mandatory adherence to ISO 22000 and FSSAI certification for all existing catering units in Indian Railways.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 6 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

To ensure compliance of Food Safety Norms, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certification from Designated Food Safety Officers of each catering unit has been made mandatory. The same is being complied in respect of each catering unit over Indian Railways. Further, ISO certifications for major units like Base Kitchens, Food Plaza, etc are being obtained progressively.

Audit Vetting Comments

No comments.

Sd/-
Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E) Railway Board
(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Observation / Recommendation

The Committee note that as per Catering Policy 2017, as per the revised protocol of understanding for time bound improvements in catering services on " Indian Railways, while the operation of major catering units has been mandated to IRCTC, Zonal Railways would continue to supervise and monitor catering services provided by IRCTC. The Committee are of the view that while responsibilities of IRCTC and Zonal Railways have been broadly demarcated, responsibility of the Indian Railways has not been earmarked. The Committee are of the opinion that the Indian Railways ought to have assumed the crucial task of ensuring that both IRCTC and the Zonal Railways adhere to the catering guidelines laid down in the Catering Policy, 2017. Noting from the audit observation that the division of responsibilities and mechanism of coordination between IRCTC and Zonal Railways with regard to daily procurement, preparation and servicing of food was not clear, the Committee are optimistic that a mechanism has since been put in place and responsibilities have now been clearly specified to ensure constant communication and seamless flow of information amongst IRCTC and Zonal Railways in their endeavor towards improving the quality of catering service to passengers of Indian Railways.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 7 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

The existing Catering Policy of 2017 envisages clear roles and responsibilities between Zonal Railways and IRCTC. This has been done keeping passengers' interest in mind and they (Zonal Railways and IRCTC) are mandated to execute their responsibility within the framework of the extant policy instructions. The provisions of Catering Policy 2017 are being implemented accordingly.

Audit Vetting Comments

No comments.

Sd/-
Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board
(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Observation / Recommendation

The Committee find that the Ministry conducts Customer Satisfaction Survey at various units through third party. In year 2017-18, IRCTC had conducted Passenger Satisfaction Survey in 117 Mobile units and 205 Static units. In year 2018-19, IRCTC had conducted 3 surveys regarding passengers' feedback on 'Choice of Menu' and their opinion on Upgraded Services in Rajdhani/Shatabdi and Duronto trains'. The Committee feel that the objective of improving the customer experience with the Indian Railways by conducting satisfaction surveys would be incomplete if no follow up improvement measures are taken thereon and the issues are not followed to a logical conclusion. The responsibility of the Indian Railways and IRCTC does not end by engaging a third party for conducting satisfaction surveys. The Committee, therefore wish to be apprised of the subsequent follow-up measures undertaken and upgrades initiated by the Indian Railways and IRCTC on the basis of various surveys conducted by the third party and also desire to be apprised of the suggestions on which action has not been taken/pending till date.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 8 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

Third party Customer Satisfaction surveys are undertaken to get the feedback and opinion of traveling passengers through a professional market research agency. Consequent upon the findings in these customer satisfaction surveys, actions taken inter-alia include the following:

- Ensuring availability of regional cuisines. Implementation of rationalized menu in trains so as to introduce the items of regional cuisines/preferences, seasonal delicacies, food items as per the preferences of different groups of passengers such as diabetic food, baby food, health food options including millet based local products, etc.
- Provision of combo meal as second meal of the day in pre-paid trains withdrawn.
- Ensuring maintenance of hygienic practices in Kitchens through deployment of Food Safety Supervisors.

- Introduction of improved packing material including crockery items in Vande Bharat trains.
- Improvement in quality of food production through real time monitoring of kitchens.
- Availability of menu cards with the service personnel was emphasized.
- Supervision and monitoring was strengthened through regular and periodic inspections and special drives by the officials of Railways and IRCTC.

Audit Vetting Comments

No comments.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)

Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Observation / Recommendation

During the course of examination of this subject, the Committee found that unfair practices were being followed in execution of catering services at stations and trains. The Committee note that discrepancies like non-provision of bills for the food items served in mobile units in trains, non-availability of printed menu cards with tariff for the list of food items sold in the mobile units with waiters and Catering Managers in trains, serving of food items less than the prescribed quantity, sale of unapproved packaged drinking water, sale of Proprietary Article Depot(PAD) items at Maximum Retail Price (MRP) with weight and prices different from the open market, sale of food articles in railway premises at higher price etc. do exist in almost all catering services. To the utter dismay of the Committee, they learn that articles unsuitable for human consumption, contaminated foodstuff, recycled food stuff, shelf life expired packaged and bottled items, unauthorized brands of water bottles, etc., were offered for sale on stations. In reply, the Ministry had stated that surprise inspections are conducted to check on the quality, quantity and overcharging of food in Indian Railways, punitive action including monetary penalty and debarring and termination of contract are done as per gravity of the complaint. To deter and discourage unfair practices, the Indian Railways are also undertaking awareness campaigns like display of menu/tariff through websites, social media, newspaper, "Trains at a Glance' mandatory with waiters, deployment of onboard IRCTC supervisors, introduced hand held POS machine with QR code for generation of bills, MRP on food boxes, e-mail and SMS based complaint facilities etc. While appreciating the steps being taken by the Indian Railways towards ensuring fair and transparent catering services, the Committee feel that the old, illiterate and passengers without access to mobile and internet services are still vulnerable to unfair treatment. The Committee, therefore, recommend that in addition to the measures being taken by Indian railways and IRCTC, provision for manual submission/reporting of complaints may also be made available, in the form of installing suggestion/complaint boxes.

Moreover, the Committee feel that the onus of ensuring fairness in catering services should be on the Indian Railway and IRCTC rather than leaving it to the passengers. The Committee, therefore recommend that the Indian Railways and IRCTC exercise vigilant monitoring and impose stringent penalty for any divergence from fair practices. Moreover, the Committee

are optimistic that necessary steps are necessary to be taken to Keep unauthorized vendors at bay and contaminated food items are invariably removed/ restricted before reaching the passenger. The Committee are also hopeful that a mechanism for real time reporting/submission and resolution of passenger complaints/grievances have been put in place so as to ensure that defective food items are immediately discontinued from the supply chain and the unauthorized and erring vendors blacklisted.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 9 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

It is the continuous endeavor of Indian Railways to provide quality and hygienic catering facilities to the passengers. Supervision and monitoring mechanism has been strengthened and a robust mechanism has been put in place for receiving passenger feedback, complaints through RailMadad for real time monitoring. In addition, other sources such as Twitter handle @IR CATERING, CPGRAMS, E-Mails, SMS, etc are in place. The passengers may also submit the written complaints/grievance with the Station Master/Manager/Train Superintendent. It is stated that continuous and ongoing efforts are made to check on unauthorized vending on trains and platforms with the help of RPF. Punitive actions are accordingly taken against the unauthorized vendors/hawkers under Section 144 of Indian Railway Act 1989 which includes imprisonment, fine or both. Drives against unauthorized vending are organized by RPF and Commercial Staff constantly to check this menace. Further, the recommendations of the Committee to exercise vigilant monitoring and imposition of stringent penalty for any divergence from fair practices have been noted for compliance.

Audit Vetting Comments

No comments.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Observation / Recommendation

Noting that the responsibility of providing catering services in Indian Railways have been given to IRCTC and catering services in Indian Railways has been managed by IRCTC since the introduction of the new Catering Policy, 2017, the Committee opine that the services provided by Railways/IRCTC need to be fine tuned and the policy up-dated on the basis of the emerging landscape to streamline the catering network. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the findings of periodic inspections or review, if any, conducted by the Ministry, third parties etc. on the performance of IRCTC in providing catering services in Indian Railways. Further, the Committee while noting that the mandate of IRCTC also includes promoting domestic and international tourism through development of budget hotels, special tour packages etc., recommend that the O/o C&AG may undertake a fresh audit on the performance of IRCTC in providing various services, particularly in premium/luxury trains including Maharajas' Express.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 10 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

Performance of IRCTC is evaluated by the Ministry of Railways on the basis of achievements of IRCTC against each parameter having targets mutually agreed and defined in the performance MOU for each Financial Year. Performance Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is a negotiated agreement between the administrative Ministry i.e. Ministry of Railways and the concerned CPSE i.e. IRCTC. The purpose of the MoU is to measure the performance of the management of the CPSE on key selected parameters against the targets agreed upon so as to improve the critical performance indicators of the organization.

Audit Vetting Comments

No comments.

Sd/-
Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E) Railway Board
(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Observation / Recommendation

In Summation, the examination of this subject assumes special significance, as it pertains to the fourth largest railways of the world. It dwells on providing the catering services to a very large number of passengers commuting every day which includes a fair number of foreign tourists who travel throughout the length and breadth of the country for various forms of tourism such as cultural, adventure, leisure and religious etc. A good service rendition in terms of good and satisfactory catering services needs an all-out effort right from the stage of inception on planning till its effective implementation. Such state-of-the-art services would not only result in full passenger satisfaction but would also become a symbol to reckon with internationally. India Railways and IRCTC should show an unwavering efficacy in improving its catering services at all points be it the running train or the platforms or any other place where passengers need them. This should be a holistic and ever improving exercise for the benefit of the commuters.

(Recommendation/Observation no. 11 of the 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

Indian Railways is committed to provide good quality and hygienic Catering Services to the travelling passengers. All efforts are being made to bring improvement and innovation in catering services to passengers. Regular supervision and monitoring is being done to ensure services as per laid down standards. Indian Railways shall continue to put in place all necessary measures in this regards.

Audit Vetting Comments

No comments.

Sd/-
Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board
(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

CHAPTER III

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS WHICH THE COMMITTEE DO NOT DESIRE TO PURSUE IN VIEW OF THE REPLIES RECEIVED FROM THE GOVERNMENT

NIL

CHAPTER IV

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH REPLIES OF THE GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMITTEE AND WHICH REQUIRE REITERATION

Observation / Recommendation

It is apparent for the Committee to see that as per the new policy, a number of catering activities which were assigned to IRCTC in 2005 policy and then transferred to Zonal Railways as per 2010 policy, were assigned back to IRCTC. The Committee note that for implementation of Catering Policy 2017, transfer of catering units to IRCTC has already been completed with the exception of one mobile unit and 13 static units which were sub-judice. The Committee while noting that 15 Kitchen Units were planned to be upgraded and 9 Green Field Base Kitchens were to be set up by IRCTC, desire to be apprised of the present status of all Kitchen Units envisioned to be upgraded; Green Field Base Kitchens to be set up and also the status of the sub-judice cases. The Committee hope that Ministry and IRCTC have formulated plans to facilitate time bound further upgradation of all catering units in line with the emerging requirements and desire to be apprised of any plans for setting up additional base kitchens, catering units and deadline for completion of such projects.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 1 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

Transfer of catering units from Zonal Railways to IRCTC as mandated in Catering Policy 2017 has been completed over all Zonal Railways. Upgradation/Setting up/development of Kitchens is an ongoing process. So far, 48 Kitchen Units including Base Kitchens have been upgraded/developed by IRCTC from where meals are being supplied in trains. The number and location of Kitchens is decided as per the requirement of meals and route of the train. The supply of meals on trains is being ensured from the designated kitchen units.

Audit Vetting Comments

MoR has not furnished the details sought by the PAC regarding the status of all kitchen units envisioned to be upgraded, green field base kitchens to be set up, and the status of sub-judice cases. The plans for setting up additional base kitchens, or catering units and the deadline for completing such projects were also not furnished.

Ministry's Reply

It is reiterated that transfer of catering units from Zonal Railways to IRCTC as mandated in Catering Policy 2017 has been completed. The number and location of Kitchens is decided as per the requirement of meals and route of the train and accordingly supply of meals on trains is being ensured from the designated kitchens. Upgradation/Setting up/development of Kitchens is an ongoing process and so far, 177 Base Kitchens have been commissioned.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Please refer to Para 10 of Chapter I for the comments of the Committee

Observation / Recommendation

The Committee note that Zonal Railways were required to prepare a Master Plan (Blue Print) of catering services to be provided at each station and onboard trains. The Committee also note that the Blue Print for provision of catering services in seven Zonal Railways (East Central, Eastern, Northeast Frontier, North Western, South Eastern, South Western and East Coast Railways) were prepared only after the Audit pointed out

the same and that many zonal Railways were not reviewing and updating the plan periodically. The Committee while noting that the Blue Print has now been prepared by all the 16 zonal railways and it is under implementation desire to be apprised of the reasons for the delay in the preparing a Blue Print of catering services by the seven zonal railways. The Committee are optimistic that necessary instructions have been issued to all zonal railways for undertaking periodic review based on which updation of the Master Plan may be effected. The Committee while opining that proper planning is an integral part of effective functioning in any enterprise recommend that the Ministry, IRCTC and Concerned zonal railways must undertake a joint review of the functioning vis-à-vis the blue prints prepared by each zonal railway every five years for better monitoring of the same.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 2 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

As per extant policy, a comprehensive blue print for the catering units at each station is prepared by Railways taking into consideration that adequate facilities are available to cater to the needs of traveling passengers. Station wise Master Plans/ Blue prints have been prepared by all Zonal Railways as envisaged in Catering Policy 2017. These Master Plans/ Blueprints for each station is prepared by Zonal Railways, in coordination with Divisions and IRCTC ensuring that adequate catering services are available to the passengers.

Audit Vetting Comments

MoR has not furnished any action taken on the recommendation of PAC to ensure that the Ministry, IRCTC, and concerned zonal railways must undertake a joint review of the functioning vis-à-vis the blueprints prepared by each zonal railway every five years for better monitoring of the same.

Ministry's Reply

Station wise Master Plans/Blue Prints have been prepared by all Zonal Railways as envisaged in Catering Policy 2017. These Master Plans/Blueprints for each station are prepared by Zonal Railways, in coordination with Divisions and IRCTC ensuring that adequate catering

services are available to the passengers. Review of Master Plan/Blueprint for stations is undertaken as and when necessitated due to passenger and operational requirements.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Please refer to Para 15 of Chapter I for the comments of the Committee

Observation / Recommendation

The Committee further note that as per the Catering Policy 2010, mobile catering services were to be provided with suitable design pantry cars and equipment of state-of-art technology. There was to be progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment. The Committee, however note that the policy of progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment in pantry cars to avoid the occurrence of fire accidents specially in running trains was not followed while manufacturing the pantry cars in Integral Coach Factory, Perambur. In this regard specifically, the Committee find that a total of 103 pantry cars were manufactured by Integral Coach Factory during April 2011 to March 2016 at a total cost of RS. 111.94 crore with provision for centralized LPG cylinders with open flames, instead of providing electric power equipment panel counters etc. and the same were distributed to all the Zonal Railways. Clarifying its position, the Ministry submitted that it is technically not feasible to retrofit an existing Integral Coach Factory (ICF) Pantry car with electric power equipment due to heavy power demand of the electrical equipment and hence switchover to Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches from ICF is the only viable option.

The Committee also note that on 10.10.2018, a Joint Procedure Order (JPO) for attachment of Pantry Cars was issued entailing provisions to switch over from flamed cooking with gas burner in Pantry Cars to flameless cooking by using the electrical equipment provided in the re-designed/modified Pantry Cars. The Committee further note that production

of ICF pantry cars has been discontinued w.e.f 01.04.2018. Hence, LHB pantry cars with electric power equipment will only be manufactured henceforth on Indian Railway and cooking with gas burners will be phased out in due course of time. The Committee are unable to comprehend the reasons as to why 103 pantry cars were manufactured by Integral -Coach Factory, during April, 2011 to March 2016 with provision- for centralized-LPG cylinders with open flame instead of providing electric power equipment panel counters despite the provision in Catering Policy 2010 for progressive switch over from gas burners to electric power equipment in pantry cars. The Committee are hopeful that the Ministry must have had conducted an internal inquiry to find out the reasons for continuing the production of gas based pantry cars till March 2016 and appropriate action taken thereon. Noting that as of April, 2018, the Ministry had taken the decision to stop the production of ICF coaches and manufacture only LHB pantry cars with electric power equipment and phase out the ICF coaches, the Committee in no uncertain words recommend that the Ministry need to prioritize phasing out the ICF coaches and stocks on its pre- decided trajectory. The Committee recommend that the Ministry undertake a survey on the present number of trains running with ICF coaches and formulate a cost effective feasible plan to expeditiously replace the ICF coaches with LHB coaches without adversely impacting the functioning of the Indian Railways and its catering services. The Committee also desire to be apprised of the present status in this regard.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 3 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

Indian Railways is committed to flameless cooking through electric power equipment in pantry cars. From April 2018 onwards, only LHB pantry cars with electrical equipment are being manufactured. As such switchover from flame based pantry in existing ICF pantries to flameless LHB pantries is being achieved progressively as envisaged in the extant policy while ensuring availability of adequate catering facilities to passengers in trains.

Audit Vetting Comments

The reply of MoR is silent on the observation of the committee regarding conducting an internal inquiry to find out the reasons for continuing the production of gas based pantry cars till March 2016 and appropriate action taken thereon. MoR has also not furnished action taken on the recommendation of the PAC to undertake a survey on the present number of trains running with ICF coaches and formulate a cost-effective feasible plan expeditiously replace the ICF coaches with LHB coaches without adversely impacting the functioning of the Indian Railways and its catering services.

Ministry's reply

Indian Railways is committed to flameless cooking through electric power equipment in pantry cars. From April 2018 onwards, only LHB pantry cars with electrical equipment are being manufactured. Production of ICF pantry during the period from 2011 to 2016 continued to ensure provision of uninterrupted catering services to passengers during the transition period. As such, switchover from flame based pantry in existing ICF pantries to flameless LHB pantries is being achieved progressively as envisaged in the extant policy.

As regards trains running with ICF coaches, presently 746 ICF rakes are being utilised for passenger carrying train operations and Indian Railways have been able to convert a total of 1241 ICF rakes into LHB. Further, conversion of ICF rakes into LHB rakes is a continuous process on Indian Railways being undertaken in a phased manner, based on availability of rolling stock.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Please refer to Para 20 of Chapter I for the comments of the Committee

Observation / Recommendation

The Committee learn that in the new Catering Policy 2017, the responsibility of setting up and operation of base kitchens had been given to IRCTC and that base kitchens were to be set up in railway premises to monitor and control the quality and hygiene of food served in trains and a business plan in this regard was to be submitted within 30 days of issue of the policy. As per Audit, only 16 base kitchens were inside the railway premises whereas 115 base kitchens were located outside the railway premises and were not subjected to quality check. As the available base kitchens were not adequate to cater to the needs of the trains, food was being procured by licensee from outside instead of being prepared in the base kitchens. Further, meals were picked up from outside base kitchens in respect of 128 trains of seven Zonal Railways. In the opinion of the Committee, since food was being procured by licensee from outside, they were evidently not subjected to regular and constant quality checks and thus, could not register an assurance for quality, hygiene and cleanliness. The Committee note that the Business Plan submitted by IRCTC was not in accordance with Catering Policy 2017 and, therefore, a revised Business Plan' was submitted. The Committee are hopeful that the Ministry have ensured that necessary provisions for quality, hygiene and- cleanliness checks and for expeditious setting up of sufficient base kitchens and catering units within a time frame have been incorporated in the revised Business Plan. The Committee desire to be apprised of details of setting up base kitchens inside the railway premises and further desire that a review of the services rendered through these kitchens may be undertaken by the Ministry to ascertain their effectiveness in maintaining quality, hygiene and cleanliness.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 4 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

In an endeavour to ensure good quality and hygienic food production, following measures are under implementation:

- Supply of meals in trains from the designated Base Kitchens.

- Upgradation /development of Base Kitchen /Kitchen Units are being undertaken.
- CCTV Cameras are being installed in upgraded Base Kitchens /Kitchen Units for better monitoring of food preparation.
- QR codes have been introduced on food packets enabling display of details like name of kitchen, date of packaging, expiry date etc.
- Third Party Audit is done to examine hygiene and cleanliness in Pantry Cars and Kitchen Units. Customer satisfaction survey is also conducted.
- To ensure compliance of Food Safety Norms, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certification from Designated Food Safety Officers of each catering unit has been made mandatory.
- Food Safety Supervisors are being deployed at Kitchen Units to monitor food safety and hygienic practices.
- Regular and surprise inspections are conducted by Railway/IRCTC officials including Food Safety Officers

Audit Vetting Comments

The reply of MoR does not address the observation of the committee regarding incorporating necessary provisions for quality, hygiene and cleanliness checks and for expeditious setting up of sufficient base kitchens and catering units within a time frame in the revised Business Plan. MoR has also not furnished the details of setting up base kitchens inside the railway premises.

Ministry's reply

Measures taken for ensuring quality, hygiene and cleanliness have been intimated in the earlier replies which are reiterated as under:

- Supply of meals in trains from the designated Base Kitchens.
- Setting up /development of Base Kitchen /Kitchen Units are being undertaken as per the laid down standards.
- CCTV Cameras are being installed in upgraded Base Kitchens /Kitchen Units for better monitoring of food preparation.

- QR codes have been introduced on food packets enabling display of details like name of kitchen, date of packaging, expiry date etc.
- Third Party Audit is done to examine hygiene and cleanliness in Pantry Cars and Kitchen Units. Customer satisfaction survey is also conducted.
- To ensure compliance of Food Safety Norms, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certification from Designated Food Safety Officers of each catering unit has been made mandatory.

It is further intimated that supply of meals on trains is being ensured from the designated kitchens. The number and location of Base Kitchens are decided as per the requirement of meals and route of the trains. Setting up/development of Kitchens is an ongoing process and so far, 177 Base Kitchens have been commissioned.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Please refer to Para 25 of Chapter I for the comments of the Committee

Observation / Recommendation

The Committee observe that some Zonal Railways had not ensured provision of pantry cars in a number of long distance trains. They find that in nine trains having a run of more than 24 hours, no pantry car was provided. Moreover, alternative services through Train Side Vending (TSV) and/or base kitchens were also not provided in some of the trains. The Committee note that the absence of pantry cars in long distance trains and Train Side Vending Services invariably attracts unauthorized vendors in trains which results in not only sale of unhygienic and unhealthy food products but also poses a safety threat for the passengers. The Committee note from the reply of the Ministry that in order to ensure provision of adequate catering services for passengers, Zonal Railways have been advised to grant Platform Vending Permissions to Static Catering Units. While recommending that due diligence may be taken in awarding Platform

Vending Permissions to Static Catering Units to ensure engagement of vendors with excellent credentials and track record, the Committee seek to be apprised of the status of granting Platform Vending Permission to Static Catering Units. Here, the Committee recommend that provision of adequate and quality food to passengers in every train should be accorded top most priority and necessary steps taken to ensure efficient and adequate catering service. It goes here without saying that these services are availed by the passengers on 'user basis' and IRCTC is only managing the services on behalf of the passengers. The Committee are also hopeful that a contingency plan has also been put in place for provision of food and water to passengers in the event of inordinate delays, accidents etc. To ensure that no unauthorized vendors are allowed on Indian railways, the Committee recommend that regular surprise inspections of catering services provided in trains/ stations may be undertaken and the report thereof uploaded immediately on an online portal for enabling the senior officers to take immediate remedial action against those found responsible.

(Recommendation/Observation No. 5 of 115th Report of
Public Accounts Committee)
(17th Lok Sabha)

Action Taken

Attachment of Pantry car in trains depends upon various factors such as availability of pantry car, operational feasibility, priority of train, duration of journey etc. However, provision of catering services to passengers travelling by trains not having pantry car is ensured through adequate number of static catering units at en route stations, Train Side Vending, E-Catering facilities, Platform Vending Services etc. As on 31.12.2023, 544 pairs of trains covering premium trains and long distance Mail/Express trains are provided with pantry car facility. In addition, 692 pairs of Mail/Express Trains are provided with Train Side Vending (TSV) services with meals pick up from en route stations. E-catering facility is available at 379 stations.

Further it is stated that continuous and ongoing efforts are made to check on unauthorized vending on trains and platforms with the help of RPF. Punitive actions are accordingly taken against the unauthorized vendors/hawkers under Section 144 of Indian Railway Act 1989 which

includes imprisonment, fine or both. Drives against unauthorized vending are organized by RPF and Commercial Staff constantly to check this menace.

Audit Vetting Comments

MoR has not furnished action taken on online uploading of the reports based on surprise inspections of the catering services.

Ministry's reply

Special drives, regular and surprise inspections of catering services provided in trains/stations are undertaken. Necessary punitive actions are taken against the instances of unauthorized vending/any other deficiency in services noticed during the drive/inspection. The observations /outcomes /findings are also shared with/communicated to the concerned officials for taking further corrective measures.

Sd/-

Pawan Kumar Kalarwal
Executive Director (S&E)
Railway Board

(Ministry of Railway's case No. 2024-BC-PAC-XVII/115th Report)

Please refer to Para 30 of Chapter I for the comments of the Committee

CHAPTER V

OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH GOVERNMENT HAVE FURNISHED INTERIM REPLIES/NO REPLIES

NIL

NEW DELHI:
12 February, 2025
23 Magha, 1946 (*Saka*)

K. C. VENUGOPAL
Chairperson,
Public Accounts Committee

MINUTES OF THE THIRTEENTH SITTING OF THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (2024-25) HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY, 2025

The Committee on Public Accounts sat on Wednesday, the 12 February, 2025 from 1500 hrs to 1715 hrs in Committee Room D, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Shri K.C. Venugopal - Chairperson

Members

LOK SABHA

2. Dr. Nishikant Dubey
3. Smt. Aparajita Sarangi
4. Dr. Amar Singh
5. Shri Tejasvi Surya
6. Shri Anurag Singh Thakur
7. Shri Dharmendra Yadav
8. Shri T. R. Baalu
9. Prof. Sougata Ray

RAJYA SABHA

10. Dr. K. Laxman
11. Shri Tiruchi Siva

LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|---|------------------|
| 1. | Dr. Sanjeev Sharma | - | Joint Secretary |
| 2. | Shri Muraleedharan. P | - | Director |
| 3. | Shri Alok Mani Tripathi | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 4. | Shri Pankaj Sharma | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 5. | Shri Atul Bhawe | - | Deputy Secretary |
| 6. | Smt. Malvika Mehta | - | Deputy Secretary |

**REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR
GENERAL OF INDIA**

1. Sh. Rebecca Mathai - Dy. CAG
2. Ms. Atreyee Das - Dy. CAG
3. Ms. Smita S. Chaudhari - Dy. CAG
4. Sh. Samar Kant Thakur - Director General

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF XXXXXX

1. XXXXXXXXXXXX
2. XXXXXXXXXXXX
3. XXXXXXXXXXXX
4. XXXXXXXXXXXX
5. XXXXXXXXXXXX
6. XXXXXXXXXXXX
7. XXXXXXXXXXXX
8. XXXXXXXXXXXX
9. XXXXXXXXXXXX

PART A

XXXXX XXXXX XXXXX XXXXX XXXXX XXXXX

PART B

Thereafter, Hon'ble Chairperson stated that the following nine draft reports may be taken up for consideration and adoption :-

a. XXXXXXXXXXXX

b. XXXXXXXXXXXX

c. XXXXXXXXXXXX

d. Action Taken by the Government on the
Observations/Recommendations of the Committee contained in
their 115th Report (17th LS) on 'Catering Services in Indian Railways'

e. XXXXXXXXXXXX

f. XXXXXXXXXXXX

g. XXXXXXXXXXXX

h. XXXXXXXXXXXX

i. XXXXXXXXXXXX

After some deliberations, the Committee adopted the aforesaid Draft Reports without any modifications and authorised the Chairperson to finalise the Reports in the light of factual verification done by the Audit.

The Committee then adjourned.

A copy of the proceedings of the Sitting has been kept on record.

APPENDIX-II
(Vide Paragraph 5 of Introduction)

**ANALYSIS OF THE ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE
OBSERVATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMMITTEE CONTAINED IN THEIR ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEENTH
REPORT (SEVENTEENTH LOK SABHA)**

- | | | | |
|-------|--|-----------------------------------|----|
| (i) | Total Observations/Recommendations | number of | 11 |
| | | | |
| (ii) | Observations/Recommendations of the Committee which have been accepted by the Government: Para Nos. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 | Total: 06 Percentage: 54.54 | |
| | | | |
| (iii) | Observations/Recommendations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the reply of the Government: Para No. – NIL | Total: 0 Percentage: 0 | |
| | | | |
| (iv) | Observations/Recommendations in respect of which replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and which require reiteration: Para No. – 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 | Total: 05 Percentage: 45.45 | |
| | | | |
| (v) | Observations/Recommendations in respect of which the Government have furnished interim replies: Para No. – NIL | Total: 0 Percentage: 0 | |