

# Centre to refund GST on rations used for langar, similar meals

**DIVYAA**

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THE CENTRE on Friday announced a scheme to reimburse its share of GST on raw material used to prepare meals in community kitchens run by religious organisations, such as langar.

The scheme, called Seva Bhoj Yojna, has an outlay of Rs 325 crore for financial years 2018-19 and 2019-20, according to a statement by the Ministry of Culture.

Union Culture Minister Mahesh Sharma told *The Indian Express*, “We have been getting representations from many social and religious organisations in this regard and have been working towards this for some time.”

The scheme envisages reimbursement of the Centre’s share of CGST and IGST on purchase of raw items such as ghee, edible oil, atta/maida/rava/flour, rice, pulses, sugar and jaggery,

which go into preparation of prasad or langar offered free of cost by religious institutions. “The objective of the scheme is to lessen the financial burden of such charitable or religious institutions who provide food free of cost without any discrimination to public/ devotees,” said the statement.

The scheme applies to only those charitable or religious institutions — temple, gurdwara, mosque, church, dharmik ashram, dargah, math and monasteries — that have been in existence for at least five years, and who serve free food to at least 5,000 people a month.

A month ago, SAD leader and Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal had written to the Prime Minister for waiver of GST on ingredients used for langar in gurdwaras. In her letter, Badal had stated that Golden Temple in Amritsar runs the world’s largest mega kitchen, offering free meals throughout the year to lakhs of people, the donation for

which comes from humble offerings of devotees. It was reported that between July 2017 and January 31, 2018, after GST came into force, Golden Temple shelled out Rs 2 crore as GST for purchasing rations for langar.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had also written to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, who is also Chairman of the GST Council, seeking exemption on inputs for langar saying that “even though food served through a langar is not taxable under GST, some significant inputs like sugar, ghee, edible oil, spices etc are taxable”.

Under the new scheme, the Ministry of Culture will register the eligible charitable religious institutions for a time period ending with the tenure of the Finance Commission, and subsequently, registration may be renewed, subject to performance evaluation of the institutions. The details of registered institutions will be available on an online portal.