

NOTE

Food for Thought

IANS writes :

Indian parliamentismore like a magic island where there is no food inflation. Can anyone imagine a vegetarian thali lunch for Rs 12.50 or a katori (small bowl) of dal at Rs 1.50, and chapatis for a rupee each at a time when the prices of essential commodities are touching the sky? Food inflation touched to 11.47 percent for the week ending August 28 as against 10.86 percent for the week before.

Yes it is possible, even if food is getting out of the reach of the poor in the country. Welcome to the Parliament House canteen—where delectable dishes will never act pricey.

A series of catering units run by Indian Railways at Parliament House, including at the library and the annexe building, serve food at rates which are a good decade old but are hard to digest for a newcomer.

MPs, who are seen shouting at each other and castigating the government over the rising food prices, definitely relish the cheap canteen food. But, mind you, the facility is not for them only. Parliament staff, low-paid security personnel and accredited journalists too enjoy the delicacies at rates which an ordinary citizen outside cannot even think of.

Dal, considered to be the poor man's food in India and which is now getting too expensive to even fit his bowl, costs just Rs 1.50 for a katori.

Low rates make the desserts sweeter. A katori of kheer at Rs 5.50 will never taste bitter. So will a small fruit cake at Rs 9.50 and a helping of fruit salad at Rs 7.

And, yes, a cup of piping hot tea is available for just Re 1—not in the canteen but along a parliament corridor at a tea board.

Where does this come from? Remember, behind the cheap commodity there is a subsidy. All this costs the government a huge amount of tax payers' money.

The gap between the actual cost and what MPs, journalists and others have to pay, is bridged with a food budget set aside by parliament.

"Over Rs 5.3 crore has been allocated during the current financial year for the canteens. The Lok Sabha pays some Rs 3.55 crore and the Rajya Sabha shares the amount to over Rs 1.77 crore," said an official.

"Not only MPs, we serve food to everybody who is allowed inside parliament. They also include workers, gardeners and labourers," the official told IANS, defending the low prices.

The food prices were last revised in 2004.

A 15-member joint parliamentary committee on food management headed by then MP K Yerranaidu of the Telugu Desam Party was constituted in 2005 to consider revision of the rates and the service.

"The committee didn't give any report and the rates were not revised," the official said.

Parliament House Canteen Food Rates :

Tea	Re 1
Soup	Rs 5.50
Dal—one katori	Rs 1.50
Veg thali (dal, subzi, 4 chapatis, rice/pulao, curd and salad)	Rs 12.50
Non-veg thali	Rs 22
Curd rice	Rs 11
Veg pulao	Rs 8
Chicken biryani	Rs 34
Fish curry and rice	Rs 13
Rajma rice	Rs 7
Tomato rice	Rs 7
Fish fry	Rs 17
Chicken curry	Rs 20.50
Chicken masala	Rs 24.50
Butter chicken	Rs 27
Chapati (a piece)	Re 1
One plate rice	Rs 2
Dosa	Rs 4
Kheer—one katori	Rs 5.50
Fruit cake	Rs 9.50
Fruit salad	Rs 7

It's time to stop trusting politicians blindly, they all are enjoying their lives, and the only people suffering are Poor and *Aam Aadmi*, while the politicians fill themselves up to the brim with this cheap food so that they have sufficient energy to throw slippers and make perfect asses of themselves inside the venerable Parliament. □□□