

'Food ATM' caters to the hungry in Surat

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THE HUNGRY and the poor in Surat have been thronging outside an "ATM" outside a restaurant near Surat railway station for the past one week. This "ATM", which is a freezer, doesn't give them money but feeds them with unused food from functions.

The brainchild of city resident Priyanka Rawal who is a member of the Lions Club International Association, Surat, the "food ATM" outside Rupa Hotel offers vegetarian food. She plans to install such food ATMs in two more locations of the city soon and gradually increase it to 10.

The food ATM, launched around a week ago, runs using unused food collected from restaurants and functions, as well as donated food. The food is stocked for around six to seven hours in the freezer.

The idea came to the mind of Priyanka when she attended a marriage function in Rajkot a few days ago. After the function, she saw children feeding on leftover food thrown outside the venue. "I felt so bad seeing children eating the leftovers. First I thought of giving them money but later I felt that by giving them money, they may get one meal and what about other days? I thought of doing something on it and zeroed in on a food ATM. I discussed it with Lions Club members who agreed with the idea. The freezer can store food for around seven hours."

Funded by the Club, Priyanka ordered the freezer and discussed the idea with Arun Shetty, president of the Southern Gujarat



The food ATM outside Rupa Hotel near Surat railway station.

Hotels and Restaurant Association (SGHRA), who agreed to give space to install the freezer outside his restaurant near Surat railway station. Arun also agreed to take care of power supply and daily services of the food ATM that is monitored by a waiter of the restaurant. The first food ATM was thus installed outside Rupa Hotel a week ago where food is available through the day.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Arun Shetty said, "It is satisfying work and hence we decided to give all support to Priyanka's initiative. Our staffer collects leftover but untouched food from our hotel and pack it in plastic transparent bag and store it in the freezer. A notice has been put up at the freezer saying that the food is of good quality to feed hungry people, free of cost. We also collect from other hotels and restaurants. People have started contacting us and donating food, including dal, rice and sabzi. We keep food for seven hours in the freezer by when the stock runs out."

After the news of free food spread across the city, several caterers started donating food to the ATM. Shetty said, "More people have started donating food and the number of hungry people have also gone up. The food ATM remains open for 24 hours. Our staffer check the food and throw away old stock after seven hours."

On plans to expand the network, Priyanka said, "At present, we have installed one food ATM and we plan to install 10 more in the city soon. Two more such freezers will come up outside Sita Restaurant in Bhatar and Shiv Shakti restaurant at Ghod Dod road in the next couple of days. The fabrication work of the freezers are in progress. The cost of one freezer is Rs 50,000 and we are using our Lions Club international fund at present. Many people have contacted us and donated money for the cause, with which we will increase the number of food ATMs. However, services is the major issue, not funds."