

## Cross many hurdles before you start shopping again



Sanitization work being done at DLF Avenue Mall in Saket on Sunday

PHOTO: SANJAY K SHARMA

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A drive along the 54-acre Saket District Centre in South Delhi Sunday evening still missed the usual holiday rush around this popular shopping hub.

The scene inside, however, was quite different. From hygiene workers in hazmat suits to fashion and retail outlets running safety mock drills, hundreds of mall and retail employees were gearing up for a reopening in the next few days when this reporter visited the complex.

At DLF Avenue, one of the three malls at the complex, this is how the shoppers' experience will change. At the entry, temperature check will be followed by monitoring of the Aarogya Setu app. Cars will be disinfected while they pass through the gate.

Before one gets to ride the escalator that takes visitors to the upper floors from the underground parking, the staff is on the hygiene drill again. A disinfection chamber has been set up to ensure shoes don't carry virus inside. Touchless hand sanitization, body scanning tunnels and fresh bunch of face masks are there as well. Before shopping can begin, another round of temperature scan and status check of the government app follows.

While those considered fit will land up at the shopping floor, any visitor with symptoms of illness will be made to sit in a waiting room.

The mall operator has tied up with Max hospitals so that medics from the chain can rush in as soon as such cases are spotted.

The giant electronic screens — originally set up for screening of high definition promotional campaigns — will now remind every mall goer about mandatory safety measures. Precautionary messages like washing one's hands for at least 20 seconds and maintaining at least 6 feet distance with fellow visitors — have replaced glitzy ads.

Other information like revised mall timings and

important announcements have occupied the centrally located display boards, which not too long ago were about brands.

Signs of change are all around — from washrooms to retail outlets. To limit the spread of the virus — now only alternate urinals and wash basins are available with an additional glass partition, which is 6-ft high.

Retailers are not behind too. While executives at the Nykaa store are mapping the floor and display racks to maintain distancing, others at Shoppers Stop and Rayban are running mock drills.

But mall executives are excited about the opening though changes have to be accommodated at every juncture — from individual job roles to overall operations.

The number of staff at the mall has to be brought down by half from 500-600. Training them for regular sanitization of every bar, handle and door and ensuring distancing among visitors, was not an easy task, according to an executive. Following the self-imposed guidelines of one visitor per 75 sq. ft mall area — the number of visitor at one point in time at the DLF Avenue, for example, may fall to 6,000.

Earlier, on a busy day the figure would cross well over 30,000.

DLF is preparing to open doors of its four malls in Delhi and Noida between 11 am and 8 pm. "Our F&B brands will reduce seating arrangements to 50 per cent and will be accepting pre-orders, take-aways and digital mode of payments. We are also embracing technology for providing real time foot traffic, real time notifications on safety and cleanliness, booking of time slots, golden hours to visit our malls which our consumers can experience very soon on DLF Malls 'Lukout' APP," said

Pushpa Bector, executive director, DLF Shopping Mall.

So far, all major states, except some, have allowed malls to operate, but with caveats. In states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and many hilly states, local authorities are ensuring region-wise opening of malls and retail activities.

Rajneesh Mahajan, chief executive of Inorbit Malls, has no time for chit chat. Three out of the five Inorbit malls — at Baroda, Bengaluru and Hyderabad — are going to welcome visitors on Monday. The remaining two in Mumbai, however, will have to wait for some time.

According to Mahajan, the in-built visitor monitoring system will be useful in tracking their movement inside the 1.5 million sq. ft of mall area that is going live on Monday.

"We are planning to open our Pacific D21 Mall and Pacific Tagore Garden Mall from 9th and 13th June, respectively. Apart from various social distancing and hygiene guidelines, we will give educational messages through online and offline platforms on Covid-19 by use of two characters Harry and Jazz — live size cut-outs, social media animations, among others. We have also taken a decision to have a hospital partner for training and support and Covid-19 task force for strict adherence and action wherever required," said Abhishek Bansal, executive director, Pacific Group.

Pacific is adding contactless food ordering and payments app at all its food courts and will encourage cashless payment methods inside the malls. Like DLF, it will segregate people with visible symptoms and high temperature.

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