

DELHI

With no jobs hungry daily workers turn to langar halls

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Since November 9, a day after the Centre banned Rs.500 and Rs.1,000 notes, the Sis Ganj Gurdwara has seen hectic

rush during lunch

About 500 kg of *dal*, 600 kg of vegetables and one tonne of rice is what it takes to feed thousands of people at the Sis Gani



The *langar* or community kitchen at the popular *gurdwara* has always been busy, with everyone from local shopkeepers and foreign tourists to the faithful and the destitute sitting down for a meal.

But for the past two weeks, the lunch rush at the *langar* hall has been more hectic than usual, and officials of the *gurdwara* management say extra food is being cooked.

Cash crunch

That's because the usual lunch crowd is now being joined by daily wage labourers, who have been left without work due to the ongoing cash crunch.

With job offers drying up and their pockets empty, labourers from around Old Delhi are making their way to *gurdwaras* and other religious places in search of a meal.

Every day since November 9, when the government withdrew Rs.500 and Rs.1,000 notes from circulation, a group of workers who gather at Hauz Qazi Chowk has made its way to Sis Ganj Gurdwara around 2 p.m. Making the daily 1 km pilgrimage for food provides the only meal for most.

Before the cash crunch, the carpenters, painters and construction workers would gather at the chowk in the morning and be picked up for jobs around the city. Now, they wait there all day, hoping to find work.

"We haven't had any work since the *notebandi* [demonetisation] was announced. So every day all of us go to the *gurdwara* to eat one meal," said Gulfam, a painter, pointing towards the out-of-work labourers sitting around the chowk.

'No other option'

Sujit, a welder who also has had no work for two weeks, added: "We don't have any other option, so we eat lunch at the *gurdwara*. Sometimes people go to the temples when there is food being distributed there."

At the *gurdwara*, the kitchen continues to serve vegetables, lentils, rice, *roti* and *halwa* for all.

On Friday afternoon, the staff and volunteers were busy serving potatoes and *dal* for lunch and preparing a turnip dish for



The kitchen in-charge, who did not want to be named, scurried around the *roti* section, where an automated *roti* machine was being repaired.

Busy kitchen

“It can make 4,000 *rotis* in an hour and uses 10 sacks of flour every day,” he said, adding that he hoped it would be repaired before dinner.

Ravinder Singh Lovely, the chairperson of Sis Ganj Gurdwara and a member of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, said that the *langar* had always been busy. About 8,000 people eat here every day.

“But we have seen an increase in the number of people coming since the demonetisation announcement,” he said, adding that *gurdwaras* across Delhi feed more than a lakh visitors every day.

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