

In goodwill gesture, Pak food chain offers free meal to Indians

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Islamabad: The owner of an American restaurant chain in Pakistan is offering free meals to any Indian visiting the country on a short-term visa, in a novel reaction to reports that a Pakistani family was refused accommodation by hotels in Mumbai.

Iqbal Latif, who runs 26 franchises of international food chain Dunkin' Donuts in Islamabad, Lahore and Peshawar, took a leaf out of Mahatma Gandhi's book to show how neighbours should be treated.

"It's not a big deal, but an effort to invoke the teachings of Gandhiji who preached love and coexistence all his life," Latif told Dawn News.

Latif's free-meal offer to Indians went into effect last week and the response has been overwhelmingly positive, the report said.

"We served 2,432 people in Peshawar, Islamabad and Lahore.

They all loved it," Latif said. Latif took the initiative after reading reports that hotel owners of Mumbai's Bhandi Bazaar area refused accommodation to a family of six people from Karachi last week, following which they had to spend the night on the streets.

The family was reportedly being refused accommodation as they did not possess the "Form C" which is to be submitted to a government department if people from outside the country come to the city on visa and stay in their lodges and hotels.

"I felt bad when I saw this that a family had to spend [a] part of [the] night [on a] footpath near a police station and another part at a pavement at the railway station," he said. Latif said since he took the initiative sales have gone up by 30 per cent. On the first day, 17 meals were served to Indians in a outlet in Islamabad's Diplomatic Enclave.

He said he was initially apprehensive about displaying Indian flags in Peshawar, but visitors waved in approval. "Where is the hate and stone throwing of Shiv Sena? Only a degenerated mind does it. We need to tell (Sena) to grow up."

Love conquers all," he said. Latif said his pro-peace initiative has not met any interference by Pakistan's intelligence agency. He said his friends from the army called him to appreciate the gesture.

"Across the border, there is no hate. We all love India. 1.4 billion people love each other. We are only marginalised by a few hate mongers on both sides. I propose such initiatives on the people-to-people level [to] help make bridges," he said.

- PTI