

Mayor steps in to settle Spencer's-hawkers tussle

Our Bureau
KOLKATA

THE problems don't seem to be over at the Spencer's second large format store at the city's Rashbehari Avenue.

The 36,000 sq ft store which was inaugurated on Monday, following an earlier disruption of the original launch by protesting hawkers, saw representatives of the Hawkers Union conduct an unauthorised audit on the premises on Tuesday, alleging non-adherence to most of the clauses. This led to a meeting at Kolkata mayor Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharyya's office on Wednesday to sort out differences between the hawkers and Spencer's Retail Ltd.

Shaktiman Ghosh, general secretary, Hawkers Sangram Committee and National Hawkers Federation, who attended the meeting could not be reached for comment. Spencer's was represented by vice-president (East) Praveen Dalal and Prabir Mitra, its legal adviser.

A statement issued by Spencer's Retail Ltd noted: "Certain clauses were imposed which have been adhered to keeping in mind the interests of the hawkers in Gariahat. Further conditions are being imposed which will inconvenience our consumers significantly."

The statement added: "The so-called store audit yesterday should have been conducted in the pres-

ence of the mayor. It has also intimidated the customers who were present at the store at that time. As per today's (read: Wednesday) meeting, we have been directed to sell only packaged masala and spices (as against loose) and not less than 500 gm. Only post-to-seeds, being an expensive commodity, can be sold in packets of 250 gm. All vegetables would be subject to a minimum purchase of 3 kgs."

These new conditions are in addition to the ones stated earlier, and subject to adherence for the next seven days, post which the situation will be reviewed again.

The statement added: "These conditions are forcing our customers to spend more during high inflation. This is also leading to restrictive trade practices as we cannot impose conditions of minimum purchase of essential commodities and perishables on the customer. However, being aware of our social responsibilities and with due respect to our honourable mayor who has so long facilitated the store operations, we have committed ourselves to the adherence of these clauses as long as we are expected to."

Spencer's Retail vice-president marketing Samar Shekhawat told ET: "The hawkers need to realise that we are operating for a com-

pletely different consumer segment and are no threat to them."

When contacted, Mr Bhattacharyya said: "The differences have been sorted out for now. If required, I will mediate again."

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A SPENCER'S RETAIL
STATEMENT