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## **“Young chefs are torchbearers of India’s culinary heritage,” says Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**

*Symbiosis School of Culinary Arts, Pune emerges Winner at Grand Finale of PHDCCI National Young Chef Competition 2025-26*

**Symbiosis School of Culinary Arts and Nutritional Sciences, Pune** emerged as the **Winner** of the maiden **PHDCCI National Young Chef Competition (NYCC) 2025-26**, while teams from **Maharashtra State IHMCT, Pune** and **Institute of Hotel Management, Pusa** were declared the **1<sup>st</sup> Runner-Up** and **2<sup>nd</sup> Runner-Up** respectively, at the Grand Finale held on 19 January 2026 at IHM, Pusa, New Delhi. The award for the **Best Bhaja Dish** was conferred upon the team from **Chef’s Kitchen Institute of Culinary Arts and Hotel Management, Kolhapur**.

The Grand Finale witnessed participation from 10 leading hospitality institutions representing all four zones of the country, including Asian Christian Culinary & Agricultural Science Institute, Hosur; Chef’s Kitchen Institute of Culinary Arts and Hotel Management, Kolhapur; Culinary Academy of India, Hyderabad; IHM Bhubaneswar; IHM Kolkata; IHM Kufri; IHM Pusa, New Delhi; IHM Hyderabad; Maharashtra State IHMCT, Pune; and Symbiosis School of Culinary Arts and Nutritional Sciences, Pune, underscoring the pan-India character of the competition.

The finalists were evaluated by an eminent jury comprising **Chef Nand Lal Sharma**, Deputy General Manager, Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation; **Chef Debjeet Majumdar**, Consultant Chef & Co-Founder, Passion 4 Hospitality; **Chef Nitin Shende**, Professor – Food Production, GIHMCT Nagpur; **Chef Srinivas V**, Executive Chef, Travel Food Services; and **Chef M. Prabu**, Joint Registrar, Dr. M.G.R. Educational and Research Institute, under the chairmanship of **Chef Anil Grover**, Certified WorldChefs Judge.

Gracing the occasion as the Chief Guest, **Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Hon’ble Minister of Tourism and Culture, Government of India, said, “Indian cuisine is among our most powerful cultural assets and a vital pillar of tourism-led growth. Our food traditions reflect the diversity, wisdom and lived heritage of our regions and our young chefs are the torchbearers of this legacy. Rapid urbanisation and changing consumption patterns present Indian chefs with a unique opportunity to lead innovation in value-added, nutritionally balanced and ready-to-eat food solutions rooted in India’s traditional knowledge systems. Platforms like NYCC are essential in nurturing chefs who are deeply rooted in tradition, yet globally confident and capable of representing India’s culinary excellence on the world stage.”

Organised by PHDCCI in partnership with the **Ministry of Tourism, Government of India**; **Indian Federation of Culinary Associations (IFCA)**; and **Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council**



**(THSC)**, the National Young Chef Competition marked the culmination of a six-month nationwide culinary journey celebrating India's rich gastronomic heritage while creating a focused national platform for Indian cuisine.

Welcoming the delegates, **Mr. Anil Parashar**, Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI, said, "NYCC was envisioned not merely as a competition, but as a national movement to restore pride in Indian cuisine among young professionals. By providing a credible, national platform, we are encouraging students to rediscover their regional food traditions and reinterpret them with contemporary relevance. The overwhelming response from institutions across India validates the relevance and timing of this initiative."

The Steering Committee of NYCC comprised **Chef Manjit Gill**, President, IFCA; **Chef Anil Grover**, Certified WorldChefs Judge; **Chef Sudhir Sibal**, Founder Member, IFCA; **Mr. Rajan Bahadur**, CEO, Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council; **Prof. Kamal Kant Pant**, Principal, IHM Pusa; and **Mr. Amarjit Singh Ahuja**, Director – Procurement, Le Meridien New Delhi.

Delivering the theme address, **Chef Manjit Gill**, President, IFCA and Chair of the NYCC Steering Committee, said, "Indian cuisine is not merely a collection of recipes; it is a philosophy shaped by history, science and cultural memory. Before innovation comes understanding. NYCC encourages young chefs to respect the roots of Indian cooking and then reinterpret them with honesty, skill and responsibility. This is how we safeguard our culinary identity while preparing chefs for global kitchens."

**Mr. Rajan Sehgal**, Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI, stated, "NYCC is a strong example of what collaboration between industry, academia and government can achieve. When young talent is supported through mentorship, national exposure and fair evaluation, it results in confident, employable and future-ready professionals."

The Grand Finale followed an intense live cook-off format, challenging participants to prepare a traditional **Bhojan** comprising a bhaja preparation, main dish, vegetable preparation, pulses preparation, curd preparation, rice or bread preparation and a sweet dish within two and a half hours, with evaluation based on technique, authenticity, innovation, sustainability and presentation.

Presenting a brief on the NYCC journey and outlining the vision ahead, **Ms. Shalini S Sharma**, Assistant Secretary General, PHDCCI, said, "From the curtain raiser to four zonal rounds across North, East, West and South India, NYCC has engaged over 100 hospitality institutions nationwide. Our vision is to scale NYCC into a sustained national platform that identifies talent, provides structured mentorship, industry integration and positions young Indian chefs confidently on global culinary platforms."

Proposing the formal vote of thanks, **Ms. Meena Bhatia**, Co-Chair – Tourism & Hospitality Committee, PHDCCI, said, "The successful culmination of the first edition of NYCC reflects the collective commitment of government, industry, academia and our young chefs. PHDCCI



remains firmly committed to institutionalizing NYCC as a flagship national initiative and expanding its impact in the years ahead.”

NYCC was supported by leading industry partners including **TATA Consumer Products, Lee Kum Kee, Nestle Professional, Cremica Food Industries, Venus Industries, Hospitality & Kitchen Solutions (HAKS), Hilton, Roseate Hotels & Resorts, Wagh Bakri Tea Group, Welbilt India, McCain Foods, Chefs Unlimited, Le Meridien New Delhi** and **Purchasing Professional Forum India (PPFI)**, whose continued engagement underscores strong industry confidence in the initiative.

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