



SHOBA NARAYAN

THE WORD ON THE STREET FOOD

05.21.07

India's Supreme Court **banned hawkers from cooking food on the street** last week. The wags and mandarins in the government seat of New Delhi are also considering the closure of all street-food stalls in Delhi proper in preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Game. (They don't want foreigners to get the proverbial Delhi Belly.) But as with all things in India, "considering" is the operative word. Even though all of us who live here complain about clogged traffic and clogged bureaucracies, it is part of the charm of this colorful messy democracy. No doubt, there will be protests from the street-hawkers about how the government is taking away their livelihood. Some leftist group will stage a walk-out from Parliament House and accuse the government of being elitist. Talk-show hosts will wax eloquent about how the wonderful *aloo-paratha* (potato stuffed flatbread) that they enjoyed with their girlfriend in the Chandni Chowk market will be a thing of the past. Delhi-ites will be polled for their views; there will be impassioned editorials in newspapers about how the short-sighted government is compromising the flavor of Old Delhi for a sanitized New Delhi. My bet is that the centuries-old gully-wallahs (stalls) will stay albeit, like the fake-handbag vendors in New York's Chinatown, out of sight when the police vans rumble around. But they'll be set up in full sartorial display the rest of the time.

To read more about street food in Delhi, see "[Up on the Roof](#)," (*Gourmet*, April 2007).

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