

# PLUS

# DOWN TOWN

## Khichdi just got a make-over

Over 20,000 kids in BMC and government schools have found another reason to be regular at school

**244**  
Mahila mandals roped in to cook the mid-day meals

**1,185**  
Schools around Mumbai that come under the mid-day meal scheme

**4 lakh**  
Number of beneficiaries under the scheme



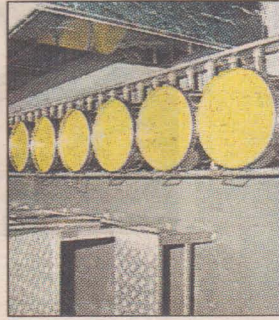
khichdi, with its associations of ill-health, has for long been the step-child of Indian kitchens. Not any more. Part of the Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS), the ubiquitous *khichdi*, is no longer shunned by the over 20,000 municipal school children in South Mumbai. So even if some primary kids aren't

once you are in Class V, quality is assured. After all, it's not just the simple *dal-chawal* variety that is doing the rounds here. If you can have your favourite *missal, rajma* and *ulital* variety at a restaurant, then so can the kids at municipal schools. Soon, we may even see kids lining up for

*nankhatais* instead of just plain *dal-khichdis*. All this has been possible with the involvement of NGOs as support systems for the State Education Department's and BMC's ambitious but incomplete plans. Agrees Basanti Roy, government education officer, Mumbai City, "As per the government regu-

### AN EXPENSIVE AFFAIR

Variety isn't easy. The State Government's Food and Civil Supplies Department provides only the rice. Three kilos per month, per child. The organisations in charge of cooking are supposed to buy the pulses, spices and vegetables. Cost The government gives 1.25 p as cooking charges per child, per day. Actual cost comes to Rs 6 per child, per day. Besides the khichdi, organisations have to provide four biscuits or a banana or an egg to each kid every Wednesday.



Class I to V, in all municipal and government-aided schools, come under the preview of the MDMS. When the Scheme their kids Mahila Mandal *khichdis*."

Radha Krishna Das, director, Radha Gopinath Mandir that runs ISKCON's MDMS from a Tardeo kitchen, says, "Kids need variety during the

We have five varieties of *khichdi* for each day of the week." Ranjana Shivdasani, principal, VBM Model School, Grant Road agrees absolutely. "We started the mid-day meals at our school with ISKCON last year and the children couldn't have been happier."

However, BRF Rahman, education officer, BMC, isn't too pleased and labels ISKCON's effort as an "experimental project covering only wards B, C and D" and some areas at Mira Road and Bhayander. "The 244 Mahila Mandals serve good quality, approved by dieticians and nutritionists. Initially, there were some complaints, but now that we have raised the diurnal cooking charges from 50 p per child to Rs 1.25 per child, things have become better."

However, only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches. Says Nahid Patel, a Class V student of a municipal school at Mohammed Ali Road, "Earlier, when we were in the primary section, I didn't like the *khichdis* because they were very bland. This year, the *khichdis* are really tasty and we look forward to lunch everyday."

Nahid just found another to study further.

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