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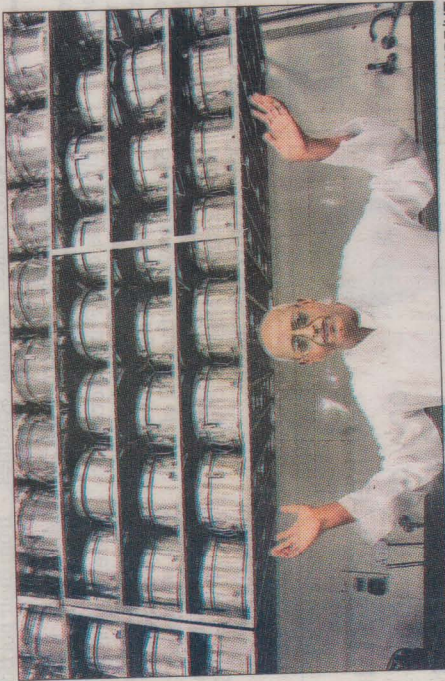
Ghee, what a lovely meal!

Dhaval Kulkarni
Mumbai, June 13

NOT ALL mid-day meals are about poorly cooked and unhygienic food. Some are about wholesome, mouth-watering khichdi made in desi ghee. Ask the 35,000 students who are supplied their meals by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Iskcon).

Iskcon has been cooking meals for kids since August 2004 — including 12,000 students of 62 BMC-run schools. The society plans to reach 60,000 children this year.

Special care is taken to clean the rice and pulses. The state-of-the-art mechanised kitchens at Mira Road and Tardeo — complete with machines that peel 10 kg of potatoes in a minute and puree 6 kg of tomatoes in just two minutes — can cook for 10,000 children in an hour-and-a-half and seal food mechanically into containers. The variety of pulses used changes everyday, so the khichdi is never the same on consecutive days.



RAJANISH KAKADE/HT
Iskcon Food Relief Foundation Mid-day Meals project director Radha Krishna Das at its canteen in Tardeo on Tuesday.

Radha Krishna Das, director of Iskcon Food Relief Foundation's Mid-day Meals Project, explained why they prefer cooking in steam cookers: "Cooking on fire can destroy nutrients." Iskcon spends Rs 6 per day per child, but gets only Rs 1.25 plus rice from the BMC and state government. The balance is met through corporate and individual donations. Said Das, "The programme is really a comprehensive educational programme seeking to reduce dropout rates and keep malnutrition at bay." Iskcon plans another kitchen at Andheri, and is seeking wider support for the scheme.