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DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS

Pat for ISKCON food project

Governor of Himachal Pradesh is impressed with system that provides meals to 35,000 children in 135 schools across city

Radhika Dwivedi. Tardeo

The kitchens of the ISKCON food relief foundation at Tardeo got a dekho from the Governor of Himachal Pradesh, former Justice Vishnu Sadashiv Kokje, on Thursday. The governor, who was visiting the city, wanted to see the kitchens that provided food to municipal and government-aided schools across the city.

"This is an important project, because food gives children an incentive to join school, rather than take up jobs," said Radha Krishna Das, the director of the project.

The food relief project was first started in Bangalore in 2002. In August 2004, it was set up in Mumbai. Now, the government-aided project provides meals to nearly 35,000 children in 135 municipal and government-aided schools across the city.

There are two kitchens, one on Tardeo and one on Mira Road. After its cooked, the food is transported in 12 vans, each of which can carry 24 containers. The shift starts at 8.30am and the last one leaves at 12.30pm.

A meal typically consists of *khichdi*, *dal* and *sabzi* cooked in pure ghee. The kitchens are provid-



■ Radha Krishna Das (left) and Himachal Pradesh Governor Vishnu Kokje (right) at ISKCON's food kitchen at Tardeo —Kamlesh Pednekar. DNA

ed with state-of-the-art equipment such as water softener and a purification plant, electronic weighing scales, high-speed potato peelers, vegetable cubing and dicing machine. The food is made in four stainless steel cauldrons each of which can cook 300 kgs of *khichdi* in 45 minutes.

"The concept of providing free meals in schools became popular in Tamil Nadu where *mahila mandals* rendered the service even before the government made the mid-day meal compulsory," Das added.

The governor had heard about the facilities during a visit to Bangalore. Which is why he was keen to see how it's run in Mumbai. "I was very impressed with the scientific system of cooking and the hygienic standards," said Kokje.

"The mid-day meal is compulsory in every state and I have already started the process of pushing the idea in my state," he added.

Food for thought

ISKCON's food relief project was started in Mumbai in 2004

Now, it reaches out to nearly **35,000 children in 135 municipal schools**

A meal consists of **khichdi, dal and sabzi**

The food is transported in **12 vans**, each of which can carry **24 containers**. The **first shift starts at 8.30am**, the **last shift leaves at 12.30pm**

Cost factor

Average cost per child is **Rs6**

The government provides **free rice**. Cooking costs amount to **Rs1.25 per child**. Sponsors bear the rest of the costs