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**Agra to have automated mid-day meal facility**

Aditya Dev, TNN | Oct 14, 2014, 09:36PM IST

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AGRA: The city is all set to have a fully automated mid-day meal facility that will cater to over 2 lakh school students in the region. It is being estimated that the project will cost Rs 18 crore.

An NGO, Akshaya Patra, has joined hands with the UP government to build the facility in Agra. According to information, the government has allotted 12,000 square meter space in the office of the Basic Siksha Adhikari (BSA) for this purpose.

The state-of-the-art centralized mid-day meal kitchen will be equipped to cook 60,000 chapatis, 8,000 litre of dal and 800 kg of rice simultaneously in one hour.

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The facility will have a rice-cleaning machine, cold storage, boilers, conveyor belt along with modern packaging and distribution systems. Most importantly, no food will be touched by hand during its preparation.

As many as 50 insulated vans will provide meals to all schools located in the 50 km radius of Agra including Firozabad, Fatehabad and Achnera among others. The facility is expected to start functioning within two years.

Meanwhile, the NGO Akshaya Patra on Tuesday started providing mid-day meals to 36,000 students studying in all the Anaganwadi schools in Agra. The meals are provided for free to the students, while the organization incurs a cost of Rs 8 per meal.

At present, the food is being cooked and transported from Akshaya Patra's kitchen being from Vrindavan to Agra on a daily basis.

RS Pareek of the Pareek Foundation, who played a major role in initiating the Agra project, said, "The students will be provided a balanced and hygienic diet that comprises of chapati, dal, rice and vegetable curry. After opening of the facility in Agra the cost of meal will come down to Rs 5. It will be funded by donors and the government."

Pareek, who started providing mid-day meals to underprivileged students of Lopamudra School in Agra with the help of Akshaya Patra in July 2013, said since the launch of the service the dropout rate has reduced to nil from the earlier 40%. "It is a huge achievement. The mental and physical condition of students has also improved," he added. City to have automated mid-day meal facility

Aditya.Dev@timesgroup.com

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