

Biscuit firms tweak plan to sell wares

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NEW DELHI: With the HRD ministry shutting its doors to the biscuit lobby, the manufacturers have now written to the women and child development ministry, repositioning their wares for the multi-thousand crore Integrated Child Development Scheme that provides nutrition to children across the country.

TOI had earlier reported that more than 30 MPs, cutting across party lines, had written to the HRD ministry in favour of the Biscuit Manufacturers Welfare Association (BMA) suggesting that biscuits supplement hot cooked food in the mid-day meal scheme.

Now, the BMA has tweaked its campaign and written yet again to MPs and the WCD ministry, this time ready to offer "specialised" products to the over 7 crore children the ICDS scheme feeds. In an interesting twist to its campaign, the association tries to ride piggy back on the Supreme Court food commissioners' reports which have pointed out leakages in the supply chain of two of the world's largest nutrition schemes.

This despite the fact that one of the commissioners and National Advisory Committee member N C Saxena had met the PM to oppose discontinuing the hot cooked meal scheme. The commissioners had also said earlier that "any attempt to do so (supply biscuits) would not only be blatantly illegal but would also most certainly be construed as contempt of court by the government of India".

However, buoyed by the fact that women and child development minister Renuka Chowdhury has, in the face of stiff opposition from the PM, other ministers, the Planning Commission, Left allies and the Opposition, defended the plan to introduce pre-packaged foods into a restructured ICDS, the biscuit manufacturers too want to ride the Rs 50,000 crore gravy train that a revamped scheme would provide over the next five years.

The BMA has proposed a 'Swasth Bharat' brand matching the nutrition norms set by the ministry to be supplied exclusively for the ICDS through its "existing distribution and logistics network".

The manufacturers' association has also suggested its own innovative ways of checking pilferage in the ICDS scheme - supply the 'Swasth Bharat' biscuits through the anganwadi network and ban any open market sale of the brand by making it "a crime attracting penal action".