

'Bal Amul' to help Bihar fight malnutrition

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Ahmedabad: Bihar seems to be following in Gujarat's footsteps in tackling the problem of 'sever acute malnutrition' or SAM. Soon, SAM affected children in Bihar will have access to nutritious Bal Amul, a therapeutic food prepared by Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets its products under the brand name Amul. Gujarat was probably the first state in India to provide this nutri-food to malnourished kids in the state.

SAM-affected children are those who do not have regular appetite or capacity to digest normal food. Bal Amul is specifically developed for children above six months. The therapeutic food made by Amul has milk solids and fortified with vitamins, minerals and protein. Crucial Nutritions, the Indian arm of UK-based company, Valid Nutrition, has approached GCMMF, to supply it Bal Amul for children with SAM in Bihar.

"We have already started supplying Bal Amul to Gujarat government. The UK-based agency working with Bihar government has placed an order for sourcing 28 30 tonnes of Bal Amul every week," said RS Sodhi, managing director, GCMMF. The first consignment is likely to be dispatched in next 2-3 days.

"Many international aid agencies had approached Amul to come up with a therapeutic food to fight SAM. We had been working on this product for a year, and it was launched just two months back. Gujarat government alone is being supplied 10 lakh packets," added Sodhi.

As per the Union ministry of health and family welfare's National Family Health Survey-4 for 2015-16, 43.9% children under the age of five years in Bihar are undernourished, and 7% are 'severely wasted' or acutely malnourished.

Gujarat government has already identified around 50,000 children with symptoms of SAM. The state government is initially taking up a pilot project in 13 tribal districts, where the problem is most severe. The state health and family welfare department, which runs the school health programme, has screened 4.3 million children, from which it identified 4.2 lakh children as having SAM, and who face a threat to their lives if not given attention.