

NGO slams medical body for endorsing juice brand

It was 'very wrong' for the Indian Medical Association (IMA) to have endorsed a particular brand of fruit juice, director of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) Sunita Narain said here Wednesday, as the endorsement of the Pepsico brand stirred a controversy.

Pepsico's India affiliate has entered into a three-year deal with the IMA under which the association that represents 176,000 doctors is endorsing the Tropicana brand of fruit juices and the Quaker oats brand.

IMA's last president Ajay Kumar has said 'Tropicana juices and Quaker (oats) have scientifically proven health benefits', but Narain called the endorsement an 'advertising trick'.

'It was very wrong for the IMA to make the endorsement,' Narain told IANS. 'What's the difference between Tropicana and any other fruit juice? Why are they endorsing only one particular brand?'

Sources at IMA said for the endorsement the medical body received Rs.5 million, which will go into their general fund. 'A doctor cannot endorse any brand, but the IMA as a body can do it. We have earlier also endorsed other brands like Eureka Forbes for which we received Rs.30 million.'

Eureka Forbes makes water purifiers.

'Just like cricketers and Bollywood stars endorse a product, we also do the same,' the source told IANS.

The association has also endorsed Dettol, an antiseptic, and Disprin, a painkiller.

Talking about the Tropicana endorsements, Narain said the same company, Pepsi, was 'fighting the establishment of standards in the soft drinks industry'. A few years ago, CSE had charged that pesticide residues had been found in soft drinks made by Pepsi and Coca Cola, a charge denied by both companies. The furore caused by the charge led the Indian government to start the framing of standards for bottled drinks.

The IMA official said: 'We're not supporting Pepsi, we're supporting a fruit juice.'

Narain said: 'If I have to watch a Pepsi advertisement, I'd rather watch (film star) Aamir Khan than some doctor. At least I know why he is modelling, and he's definitely better looking.'

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