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LOBBY PITCHES TEA AS ENERGY DRINK FOR SCHOOL KIDS AND TEENS

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Kolkata: Tea, the age-old morning brew of elders at home, is set to get a makeover as an energy drink for kids — mainly school-goers aged between 12 and 17. For the first time, the Indian tea industry, which has been hit hard by stagnant per capita consumption, is all set to chant the 'catch 'em young' mantra.

Indian Tea Association, the biggest tea producers' body in the country, is embarking on an ambitious and unique business-to-schoolchildren (B2S) tea promotion project to make the drink popular among teenagers. The campaign, set to begin before the Pujas, will involve events in schools, audio-visual capsules, commercials and 'Bournvita Contest'-like TV programmes. To begin with, it will target 5-6 schools across the country.

ITA chairman Azam Monem told TOI: "We have seen that kids are allowed to drink tea instead of other beverages in countries like China, Iran and Pakistan. We have to break the myth in India, too. The number of children drinking tea, especially in urban India, is relatively low despite the beverage's health benefits. We have assigned two ad agencies to give us separate comprehensive reports on the possible campaign layout this month. The main aim is to get 50 paise more from every cup of tea in India."

The campaign will also aim to coax parents and teachers to encourage their children to drink tea.

Despite being one of the top producers of black tea in the world, per capita consumption of tea in India, according to the latest Tea Board study, is only about 786gm a year while it is 1.2kg in Pakistan, 1.6kg in UK and 2.3kg in Ireland. "Although it has improved from 730gm, it should be at least 1kg in India. To touch that figure, we need to find a huge number of new consumers. We have found that a population of 350 million does not drink tea and they are all children. That is one market we have not tapped yet," added Monem. People in the 35-plus age group form the major chunk of tea drinkers in India.

ITA's move comes almost three decades after a WHO report said that tea drinking boosts longevity. "We have taken a concerted view on tea promotion following the success of our 'Chai ho jaye' business- to-business initiatives in tea cafés and lounges and business-to-youth campaigns among college students across the country. We now believe teens who are fast turning to coffee and other beverages due to their more contemporary image can be tea drinkers, too," added Monem. ITA's B2Y campaign had mixologists preparing tea mocktails of different flavours for students in canteens, fests and impromptu camps on many college campuses.

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