

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Nothing has changed, says CSE, despite the Kerala High Court decision. Soft drinks as unsafe as before**

**New Delhi, September 22, 2006:** Reacting to the Kerala High Court's decision to set aside the ban imposed on production and sale of Coca-Cola and Pepsi in the state of Kerala, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) said that it was very unfortunate. "The government has still not notified the safety norms and without these, the drinks remain as unsafe as before," said Sunita Narain, director, CSE.

It may be recalled that in August 2006, CSE had released its study on soft drink brands sold across India, in which it had reported that all the samples tested by it contained levels of pesticide residues much beyond the standard finalized (but not notified) by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). CSE had said that there was collusion between the government and the soft drink industry, because of which this standard had not been notified. In fact, it had released a letter from the secretary for consumer affairs which clearly points to this collusion. Since then, the Union health minister has informed the Parliament that the norms will be notified – without indicating any time frame for doing the same.

It is reported that the Kerala High Court has set aside the ban in the state on the basis of a technicality: that under the current law, only the Central government is empowered to ban any food product. CSE, however, pointed out that the problem is that the Central government has not set up the regulations, which would ensure that these drinks are safe. In the absence of this regulation, the states have no option but to impose bans to protect the health of their citizens.

The court has also reportedly ruled that the ban must be set aside because it is based on the report of a non-governmental organization and not the government. This again is unfortunate as it must be noted that the Union government has still not made public its reports on the pesticide residues in these drinks. On August 22, 2006, Union health minister Anbumani Ramadoss had said in Parliament that his government had tested two bottles of soft drinks and found no residues in them -- on the basis of which he had reportedly given a clean chit to these products. But the government has never made this report public.

The health minister had, on the other hand, released the report of its expert committee commenting on the CSE study. In this report, the points raised against the CSE study were copied verbatim from the report of Coca-Cola sponsored study by the UK-based Central Science Laboratory. Since then, CSE has issued a point-by-point rebuttal to the health minister and his expert committee's 'junk science'.

*For more details, please visit our website ([www.cseindia.org](http://www.cseindia.org)) or speak with Souparno Banerjee on 98100 98142, or write to him at [souparno@cseindia.org](mailto:souparno@cseindia.org)*