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India asks Pepsi to cut down sugar in sodas

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India has asked US soft drinks giant PepsiCo to reduce the sugar content of its sodas as the country battles growing levels of obesity and diabetes.

PepsiCo chairman Indra Nooyi met food processing industry minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal during a visit to India on Tuesday to discuss its plans for healthier options and investing in India.

"PepsiCo has been requested to further bring down the sugar content of soft drinks so that the health aspects of such products are duly taken care of," the ministry said in a statement after the meeting.

PepsiCo was not immediately available for comment when contacted by AFP on Wednesday.

Undernutrition remains rampant in India. But soft drinks and fast food consumption has increased among the middle classes as incomes have risen, leading to a rise in obesity and diabetes levels.

The soft drinks giant has been replacing some of the sugar in its fizzy drinks with stevia, a natural sweetener which is widely used in Europe and parts of Asia.

But it has not been able to do so in India because the substance has not been approved for consumption.

The soft drinks giant, which markets 7Up, Mirinda and Mountain Dew as well as Pepsi in India, plans to more than double its production

capacity in the country by 2020 along with its bottling partners.

Nooyi has said PepsiCo, the world's second-largest beverage firm, aims to double its investment in Asia's third-largest economy.

Last year, she announced the company would invest $5.5 billion in India by 2020.

India's consumption of soft drinks remains low relative to its Asian neighbours, making the market particularly attractive.

Pepsi entered the country as it opened to foreign companies over two decades ago.

It currently has 38 bottling plants and three food plants in India.