

Desi premium liquor's army store biz up 264%

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New Delhi: International spirits companies selling high-end brands have had a dry run at Indian army canteens as sales of made-in-India premium liquor shot up by 264% between April-September this year after these stores banned imported finished goods from October 2020. Sales of completely imported liquor in the price bracket of Rs 1,600-2,600 and above for a 750ml bottle at canteen stores department (CSD) plunged to around 500 cases between April and September from about 17,500 cases in the same period last year, showed the latest data from the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC).

"Good sales of premium Indian liquor in CSD canteens will give a major boost to do-

mestic production of high-quality products. Growth in demand will lead to more investments and employment opportunities. It is a win-win situation for the Indian liquor manufacturers," said Rakshit N Jagdale, MD, Amrut Distilleries, makers of Amrut single malt and several Indian products. In comparison, desi premium liquor sales grew to around 24,736 cases from about 6,795 cases last year. All sales figures are for nine-litre cases.

"The ban has allowed super premium products to replace similar imported products. It is incorrect to say that imported products do not have Indian alternatives," Vinod Giri, director general at CIABC, wrote in a letter to Major General Y P Khanduri, GM at CSD, which TOI reviewed.

Several senior executives at

THE BAN IMPACT

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► Made-in-India premium liquor sales grew to 24,736 cases during **April-September** from 6,795 cases in the year-ago period

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— A SENIOR EXEC AT A GLOBAL LIQUOR COMPANY



► CSD banned 422 directly imported items in October 2020

top international liquor companies, however, said that CSD consumers or armed forces and their families have been robbed of choice. "Although the sales dip is correct, it's not about consumer preference but more about lack of choice. These consumers currently cannot choose between Indian and fo-

reign-made brands," a senior executive at a large global liquor company told TOI.

CSD, arguably one of the largest retailers in India with 4,000 stores and annual revenues of around Rs 20,000 crore, decided to ban 422 directly imported items from army canteens after PM Narendra

Modi's push for Atmanirbhar Bharat. At the same time, several domestic manufacturers, too, geared up to boost local sales of their indigenous malt whisky and gin brands, priced on par or above their foreign counterparts.

"Increasing acceptance of Indian brands of liquor within CSD, especially premium alcohol, epitomises the superior quality Indian manufacturers are committed to delivering," said Vijay Kauthekar, EVP (sales & marketing), John Distilleries, makers of Paul John range of single malts.

Overall sales of liquor in CSD grew by 70% over the same period last year after the ban was imposed. This is far ahead of the civil market outside CSD where the growth for the same period was 23%, CIABC wrote in the letter.