

# Alcohol companies write to govt: Some are being favoured

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PROMINENT LIQUOR manufacturers have alleged that orders for their brands have been stopped in liquor shops run by Delhi's tourism department, which account for nearly a third of sales. The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) wrote to the managing director and CEO of the Delhi Tourism and Transport Development Corporation seeking an appointment to discuss the decision.

CIABC includes manufacturers such as Radico Khaitan Ltd, Allied Blender & Distillers Pvt Ltd, Mohan Meakin Ltd, AlcoBrew Distilleries Pvt Ltd, Devans Modern Breweries Ltd and Sula Vineyards Pvt Ltd.

"We have been informed that since early December, orders for supply for many brands of our member companies have been stopped... only a select few brands have been categorised as 'popular' and orders for supply are being given for only these brands. It shall be pertinent to note that the current excise policy commenced on 1 September 2022 and it is unfair to categorise only a select few brands, within a very short period of time, as 'popular' and then stop orders without any intimation or notice to supplier companies. This has disrupted the business of supplier companies..." reads the letter, written by Vinod Giri, director-general of the CIABC.

"We also wish to bring to your urgent notice that companies have paid full year fees, even for the truncated seven months period of the excise policy in force," Giri wrote. The letter has also been sent to Delhi government's excise and finance departments.

While DTTDC officials said they were aware of the matter and a solution would be found soon, senior excise department officials called the move "normal course correction".

"We checked with the DTTDC and found that no brand is being stopped and it is normal course correction. Analysis of four months was done and it was found that some suppliers were pushing their brands because of which other licensees were facing losses. For example, if a customer at a shop is asking for a particular brand, staff at the shop will tell you that the brand is not available and will suggest another one... Such activities were stopped and course correction has been done, said the official.

"We think that such pre-determination is a form of brand pushing, distorts competitive field unfairly, stifles innovation, and works against the emerging products and new launches," Giri told *The Indian Express*.

"We have been told that an emerging quality Gin brand Terai is not being ordered despite being registered. Sula has 24 brands registered, but orders are being given only for four. Allied Blenders & Distillers has five brands registered, but orders are being placed only for Officers Choice Blue, brands like Sterling Reserve and even Officers Choice, India's highest selling whiskey, are not on the list. Delhi market is already in turbulent flux, such inexplicable moves by the largest retailer just add to it for no obvious reason," he said.

Decisions revolving around Delhi's liquor policy over the past year and a half are now under the scrutiny of the CBI and the ED, following allegations of corruption. A new policy was put in place and only the government was allowed to open liquor stores, pushing the private sector out entirely.