

# Supply up, some liquor brands still unavailable

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**NEW DELHI:** After two weeks, liquor supply in Delhi has finally improved with 910 of the 930 hotels, clubs and restaurants (HCR) in the city renewing their licences, according to an official aware of the matter.

In addition, 110 wholesalers have got fresh licences, which were mandatory to continue their businesses after the Delhi government last month extended the existing excise policy till March 31, 2024.

Consumers said they could tell the difference. "I went to a restaurant in Connaught Place in the second week of October, and was disappointed when two common beer brands were not available. But on Sunday, they were there," said Vineet Awasthi, a finance sector professional.

The Dussehra-Diwali festive season is usually the time liquor sales in the Capital are the highest for the year.

Consumers and officials said some premium brands were still missing from the shelves – likely due to the excise department not registering some brands due to the ongoing probe in the previous excise policy.

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Manpreet Singh, treasurer of the National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI), said the supply of some popular beer brands, such as Bira and Budweiser, has seen a boost. "But common premium products such as Chivas Regal whisky are still unavailable due to separate excise probe issues. So, the consumers are going to Gurugram. Some wholesalers are also yet to be registered because they haven't completed the paperwork," Singh said.

A Lajpat Nagar restaurateur, who did not want to be named, said the regular supply of Kingfisher beer is not yet up to the mark, as the licence has not been renewed. A Delhi government official, too, said that the delay in Kingfisher's application is the reason for its non-availability in the city. HT reached out to the United Breweries Group, which owns Kingfisher. However, it did not respond to HT's queries.

Pradeep Singh, who works for a private firm, said the situation led to people calling restaurants in advance before planning an evening out. "We have to call the restaurant to ask if they have the brands of our choice."

At the heart of the problem is the expiry of the existing excise policy on September 30. While the government issued a notification allowing licencees to apply for a six-month extension after paying a fee, wholesalers had to obtain licences afresh.

Excise department officials, however, maintained that they had issued an alert 10 days in advance asking licenseees to ensure adequate stocks.

After the extension, all licencees under the HCR categories were required to renew their licences. An excise official said that at the time of the extension, Delhi had around 930 HCR licencees, and now 98% of them have got their licences renewed.

Vinod Giri, director general, Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC), said, "Stock problem occurs every time the policy is changed. The way out of this is to begin renewal process much in advance. The policy should ensure stability."