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India’s top court weighs a ban on spirits in sachets

The petition says colorful fruit-flavored packaging misleads consumers and makes alcohol easier for minors to obtain

Tuesday, May 26, 2026



India’s Supreme Court has asked the federal government to respond to a petition seeking a ban on spirits sold in Tetra Packs and sachets, after a public interest group argued that colorful packaging and fruit-flavored names such as “green apple vodka” and “mango vodka” can mislead consumers and encourage risky drinking.

A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M. Pancholi agreed on Wednesday to hear the case filed by Community Against Drunken Driving, an Indian nongovernmental organization that says the current excise framework leaves too much room for alcohol to be marketed in ways that resemble fruit juice or other nonalcoholic drinks. The court also sought responses from Globus

Spirits, one of India’s major liquor companies, and Wave Distilleries and Breweries, a beverage producer named in the petition.

The group’s lawyer, Vipin Nair, told the court that the definition of a bottle under India’s excise rules is vague and that the lack of clear standards allows alcoholic products to be sold in packaging that can confuse buyers. He said the state has a duty to protect citizens from deceptive labeling. According to the petition, some packs use bright colors and images of apples, mangoes and other fruit while containing vodka or other spirits.

The court said the packaging appeared “very deceptive” and could lead some people to believe the contents were fruit juice. The petition argues that such products make alcohol easier to conceal, easier to carry across state borders and easier for minors to obtain. It also says the format can encourage drinking in public places and drunk driving because the packs are small, portable and less conspicuous than standard bottles.

The NGO has asked the court to push for a nationwide standard on liquor packaging and bottling under India’s excise system. It wants the Union government to guide states toward a uniform policy that would bar sales in tetra packs and sachets. The group says alcohol sold this way does not carry prominent health warnings comparable to those on cigarette packs, even though it believes the products pose similar public health risks.

In comments reported by The Times of India, the organization said labels such as “Bunty Premium Vodka,” “Chilli Mango Vodka” and “Premium Romanov Vodka – Apple Thrill” show a deliberate effort to market alcohol in a way that resembles flavored beverages rather than spirits. It said fruit names and vivid images are used to attract younger consumers and avoid scrutiny.

The case comes as Indian regulators continue to face pressure over alcohol marketing, labeling and enforcement across state lines, where excise rules can vary widely. If the court presses ahead with the petition, it could force the government to clarify how spirits may be packaged and sold in one of the world’s largest alcohol markets.