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India’s Food Safety Regulator Challenges Age Claims on Spirits Labels

Notices to alcohol makers in India also question unauthorized flavor use, raising the prospect of swift packaging changes

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India’s food safety regulator has sent notices to alcoholic beverage makers over what it says are misleading age claims and the use of unauthorized added flavors, opening a new compliance dispute for spirits sold in one of the world’s largest drinks markets.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, known as FSSAI, said the notices concern alleged violations of the Food Safety and Standards (Alcoholic Beverages) Regulations, 2018. According to The Packman, the regulator asked companies to explain why action should not be taken against them under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

At issue are two areas that go to the core of how spirits are made and marketed. One is the alleged use of added flavors in categories where Indian rules do not allow them. Under those regulations, products including brandy, gin, rum, vodka and whisky must get their characteristic flavor from raw materials and the production process, not from added flavoring substances. The other is the use of the word “aged” or similar age-related statements on labels without a required clarification that the stated age refers to the youngest spirit in a blend.

FSSAI said that leaving out that disclosure could mislead consumers about a product’s actual age. In blended spirits, age statements can be especially sensitive because they shape perceptions of quality, price and authenticity. A stricter reading of the rule could force some producers to revise labels quickly in India and could also prompt a review of formulations if any products rely on flavor additions that regulators consider impermissible.

The number of manufacturers that received notices was not disclosed. The regulator also did not publicly identify the brands involved in the report cited by The Packman.

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies said FSSAI had called for consultations with stakeholders, including industry associations, in the following week. In a statement cited by The Packman, the group said its members “strictly follow all laid norms and guidelines mandated by FSSAI.”

A stakeholder meeting had been scheduled for July 14 to discuss the matter, according to the report. That suggests the regulator may be seeking industry input even as it presses companies to respond to possible enforcement action.

The move comes amid broader scrutiny by Indian authorities of labeling accuracy and product claims across food categories. For alcohol producers, the immediate concern is practical as much as legal. Any change in how age claims must be presented can affect packaging inventories, brand messaging and retail compliance. Questions over flavor use could carry wider implications for imported and domestic spirits alike, particularly in categories where producers market products around taste profiles that consumers may associate with barrel aging or traditional production methods.

For drinks companies operating in India, the case is likely to be watched closely beyond the spirits segment. It signals that regulators are paying closer attention to whether labels describe maturation and composition in a way that matches technical rules. That could matter for how beverage companies present premium cues on bottles and cartons, especially when those cues influence consumer expectations at higher price points.

FSSAI’s action does not by itself establish wrongdoing by any manufacturer. But by formally asking companies to explain alleged breaches tied to age declarations and flavor practices, the regulator has raised the prospect of near-term changes in labeling and compliance standards for alcoholic beverages sold in India.