Dated: 30.07.2017(Sunday)

Why rare whisky is rarer in India

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is difficult to bring luxury portfolio into India because the bottles have to be sent to FSSAI for sampling.
- Price of these products range anywhere between Rs 6 lakh and Rs 8 lakh for a bottle.
- Besides, there are local labelling issues — one has to have a separate label for each state one is selling in.

Ever wondered why you can’t lay your hands on a really rare whisky in India? Liquor companies say they find it difficult to bring in their luxury portfolio into the country because the bottles have to be sent to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for sampling.

"If there are only 20 bottles produced in the world, we can’t afford to send one to the lab for testing," said the marketing head of one of the largest whisky producers in the world.

For instance, the current demand for premium Japanese and bourbon whisky poses a dilemma for both manufacturers and importers. "The Japanese produce less whisky. On top of that, a product such as a 25-year-old Yamazaki is so hard to get that it would be foolish to bring it to India and send a bit of it for sampling," said whisky ambassador Sandeep Arora.

Apart from the prohibitive price of these products, which could range anywhere between Rs 6 lakh and Rs 8 lakh for a bottle, the definition of ‘rare’ in the world of whisky has also changed.
"Ten to 15 years ago, age used to decide the exclusivity of the liquor — 40, 50 or 60-year-old whiskies from brands such as Macallan, Glenfiddich and Dalmore were in demand," added Arora.

"But currently, manufacturers are focusing on limited-edition bespoke whisky. These are fewer in number and therefore harder to get." FSSAI CEO Pawan Aggarwal said manufacturers need to come up with a solution because the testing procedure cannot be done away with. The bottles are returned to the manufacturers after testing. But of course, they can't be resold. We are open to discussion on how we can solve this problem. Or else, they can sell them in duty-free shops."

While firms shy away from bringing their blueribbon brands into the Indian retail market, in places such as the US, UK, France and West Asia, these are being sold at retail stores such as Royal Miles Whiskies in Edinburgh, Scotland.

In India, the problem is not just about testing regulations. "Selling here is like selling in 28 different countries," said the MD of a global liquor firm.

"There are local labelling issues — one has to have a separate label for each state one is selling in. We have thought about bringing in some of our really premium products, but every time, these policies have made us think again."