

Sale of spurious toddy may spike



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Given the gap in demand and production of organic toddy, the reasonably large market for cheap liquor

The Excise Department has flagged the possibility that toddy laced with illicit spirit and other harmful substances could capture the reasonably large market for cheap liquor in Kerala with licensed outlets opening for takeaway sales on Wednesday.

A meeting of top enforcers chaired by Excise Commissioner S. Aananthakrishnan highlighted the spectre of lawbreakers palming off arrack-fortified synthetic toddy to customers, given the considerable gap in the demand and production of organic coconut palm sap.

Moreover, the meeting concluded that the increased movement of freight from across the border and easing down of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions have opened the door for the increased inflow of illicit spirit sourced by inter-State smugglers from sugarcane growing regions in North India.

Excise officials said that as a general rule of thumb, bootleggers mix roughly 100 litres of organic palm sap with 70 litres of illicit spirit and 100 gm of sugar and water to make 1,000 litres of synthetic toddy.

Synthetic toddy

The estimated production cost of genuine toddy is ₹90 a litre by a conservative estimate. However, the same quantity of bootleg toddy costs less than ₹10 to produce. Synthetic toddy is indistinguishable in smell and flavour from natural palm sap. The department lacks a sufficient mobile testing laboratories to chemically examine toddy samples for the presence of added spirit and other spurious substances.

An official said random tests have yielded the worrying presence of chloral hydrate, a sedative and hypnotic drug, and a chemical concoction of saccharine, lead, sulphated ash, and benzoic acid, in toddy samples.

Mr Aananthakrishnan has called for stricter monitoring of toddy tapping and producing processes, especially in Palakkad and Alappuzha districts, in the wake of the intelligence warnings.

The department has deployed plainclothes squads on motorbikes to comb byroads and trails that link Kerala to neighbouring Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to detect spirit smuggling.

Source:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Thiruvananthapuram/sale-of-spurious-toddy-may-spike/article31577317.ece>