Kerala: bars told to strictly enforce the ban on liquor sale to under-23s and check age proof

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News

In Kerala, selling liquor to anyone under 23 is already banned under the Abkari Act (the age has been 23 since 2017). On 30 Oct 2026 Excise Minister M. Liju ordered bars to enforce this strictly and to serve liquor only after checking the Aadhaar card or other age proof of any customer who appears to be under 23; bars that violate the rule will face stringent action. The move follows the 11 Oct crash at Nedumbassery near Kochi, in which a car driven by a 19-year-old – reportedly drunk after visiting three bars – hit a scooter, killing three youngsters aged about 21; the Excise Department booked the three bars.

Key facts

Law	Kerala Abkari Act, 1077 (Kollam era) – Sections 15A, 15B (age-23 limit)
Age-limit history	18 → 21 (Feb 2013 ordinance) → 23 (Abkari (Amendment) Ordinance No. 38 of 2017, 21 Dec 2017)
30 Oct 2026 order	Excise Minister M. Liju – check Aadhaar/age proof whenever in doubt
Trigger	11 Oct 2026 – Nedumbassery (near Kochi) crash; 3 killed; 3 bars booked

Constitution	State List Entry 8 – intoxicating liquors; Entry 51 – excise on alcoholic liquor; Article 47 – prohibition (Directive Principle)

Background

- Constitution: Entry 8 of the State List (Seventh Schedule) – 'intoxicating liquors: production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale'. So each State sets its own minimum age (Kerala 23, Tamil Nadu 21). Alcoholic liquor for human consumption is outside GST; the excise on it (Entry 51) is a major State revenue.
- Directive Principle: Article 47 – besides raising nutrition, living standards and public health, the State shall endeavour to prohibit the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health. Prohibition, village panchayats (Art. 40), cottage industries (Art. 43) and cow-slaughter ban (Art. 48) are classed as 'Gandhian principles'.
- Dry States: Gujarat has had total prohibition since its formation in 1960 (continuing the Bombay Prohibition Act, 1949). Bihar – since April 2016; Nagaland – since 1989; Mizoram re-imposed prohibition in 2019.
- Legal gap: giving liquor to a child under 18 is punishable under Section 77 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015; but in Aug 2026 the Kerala Excise Department said it lacks power to prosecute under that Act.

Tamil Nadu link: the minimum age to buy/drink liquor in Tamil Nadu is 21. In May 2026 the State reaffirmed this limit, and CM Vijay ordered closure of 717 TASMAC shops within 500 m of places of worship, educational institutions and bus stands. History: C. Rajagopalachari's (Rajaji) Madras Presidency government first introduced prohibition in Salem district in 1937.

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