Ban on Liquor Vends on Highways

Why in news?

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The Supreme Court on Thursday banned States and Union Territories from granting licences for the sale of liquor along National and State highways across the country.

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What was the order?

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- The Bench said the licences of liquor shops across the highways will not be renewed after March 31, 2017.
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- The judgment ordered that the prohibition on sale of liquor alongside highways would extend to stretches of such highways that fall within limits of municipal corporations, city towns and local authorities.
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- The court prohibited signages and advertising of availability of liquor on highways and ordered the existing ones to be removed forthwith from both national and State highways. It noted that the highway should be absolutely free from any distraction or attractions.
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- It also ordered that no shop for sale of liquor should be visible from the National and State highways and noted that the visibility is the first temptation.
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- Neither should they be directly accessible from the highways nor should they be situated within a distance of 500 metres from the outer edge of the highways or service lanes.
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- It gave the Chief Secretaries and the State police chiefs a month’s time to chalk out a plan for enforcement of the judgment.
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- One of the pleas noted that, India being a signatory to the **Brasilia**

Declaration on Road Safety, it is imperative that policy guidelines are framed to control road accidents. Also, the excise policies of Indian states and Union territories should be amended to conform to the spirit of **Article 47 & Article 21** of the Constitution of India.
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What was the court's rationale?

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- SC noted that drunken driving was the main culprit behind a large number of road accidents in the country.
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- The judgment is a result of the deep concern the court had expressed recently on the 1.5 lakh fatalities annually in road accidents and about 15,000-16,000 deaths were caused because of driving under the influence of alcohol.. It had blamed the Centre and the States for not doing enough as lives were lost on the roads.
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- An analysis of road accident data 2015 reveals that around 1,374 accidents and 400 deaths take place every day on Indian roads, resulting in 57 accidents and loss of 17 lives on an average every hour
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- The court said revenue generation could not be a "valid reason" for a state or a Union Territory to give licence for liquor shops on highways.
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- Though many hailed the decision aimed at saving human lives, others argued that even if liquor is not available along National Highways, one can always buy it beforehand. Those who are fond of drinking will not stop because of this.
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What was the government's reaction?

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- Liquor vends in Haryana were shifted from National and State Highways in 2014 following the orders of the Punjab and Haryana High Court.
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- The Telangana government expected a huge impact on the business of retail outlets selling Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and bars along highways

in the wake of the order.
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- The Kerala government will comply with the Supreme Court order to shut down liquor shops abutting national and State highways though it was not sure whether the order applied to bar hotels, wine and beer parlours, and toddy outlets.
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