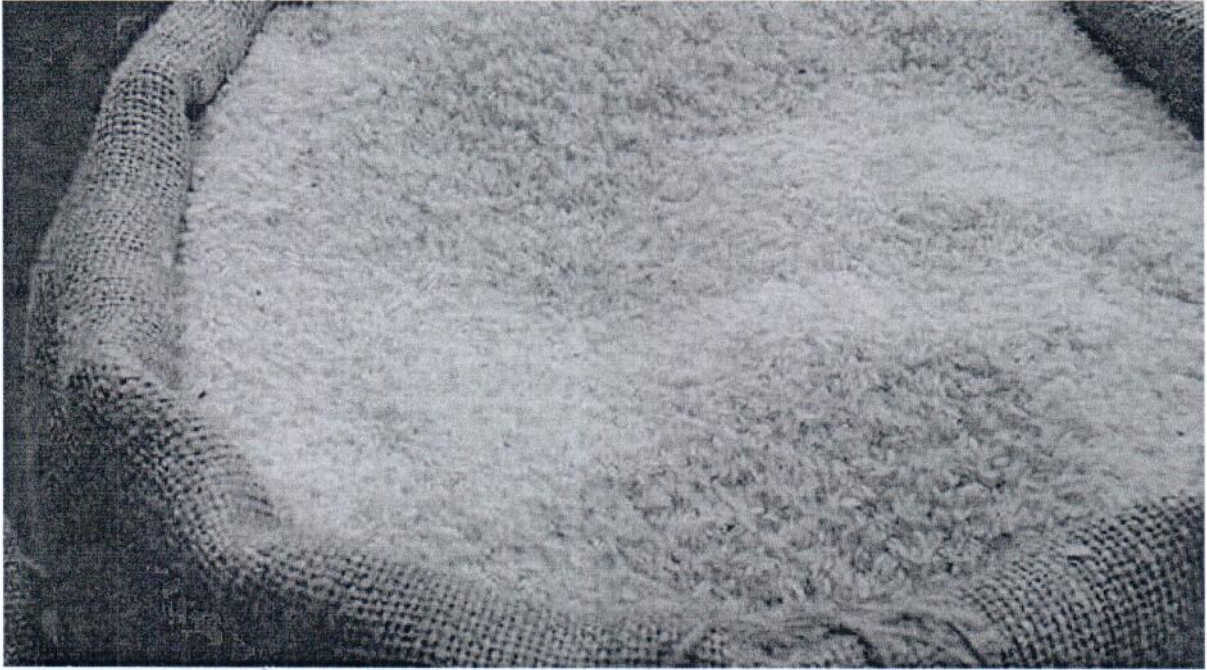


India to waive curbs, allow food items to be shipped to Bhutan

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New Delhi: India will allow around 103,600 tonnes of food items to be exported to Bhutan under a humanitarian operation, making an exception for its strategic partners amid export restrictions, two senior government officials said. This comes after possible signs of progress in long-running boundary talks between China and Bhutan grabbed India's attention as Beijing stepped up efforts to establish diplomatic ties with the tiny Himalayan kingdom.

In August, it exported 79,000 tonnes of non-basmati white rice to Bhutan, followed by 1.98 million tonnes of the staple to nine other key Asian and African nations, including Singapore, Nepal, Malaysia and the Philippines upon request after India imposed a ban on exports of non-basmati white rice on 20 July.

India will supply 14,184 tonnes of wheat grain, 5,326 tonnes of wheat flour, nearly 15,300 tonnes of maida, suji (semolina) and 48,804 tonnes of broken rice to

Bhutan under humanitarian operations, one of the officials said. It will also supply around 20,000 tonnes of sugar to Bhutan, the other official said.

The exports will be done through National Cooperative Exports Ltd, a government export body which was set up under the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002 to export agricultural produce and allied items.

“We cannot turn down requests for food items by countries such as Nepal and Bhutan that are dependent on imports to meet their domestic demand. To keep the strategic relationship intact both ways, despite the ban, we are offering help to an extent that doesn’t pinch us,” the second official added.

Bhutan depends on imports to meet food demand. It mainly imports oil and fuels, base metals, machinery and electrical appliances, vehicles, wood and food.

Bhutan’s main import partner is India which contributes to around 80% of total imports.

Other import partners include South Korea, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, China and Nepal.

From April to September, India’s agricultural exports to Bhutan were \$65.19 million as against \$79.63 million in the same period last year. In FY23, India’s exports to Bhutan of goods in agricultural commodities, including cereals, spices, meat, dairy and poultry products were \$148.31 million of total \$1.07 billion against \$135.94 million out of a total \$874.53 million in FY22, according to the ministry of commerce and industry.

Meanwhile, China’s exports to Bhutan have been increasing over the years.

Exports of goods went up to \$169.42 million in FY22 from \$13.34 FY18.

Queries sent to the spokespeople of the Bhutanese embassy in New Delhi and the union department of food and public distribution remained unanswered at press time.

Since last year, the Central government has taken several measures to tame food inflation, including curbs on sugar exports and a ban on wheat export in May 2022, prohibition on the export of broken rice in September 2022 and an export ban on non-basmati white rice in July 2023.