

Rice war: India gearing up to counter Pakistan's GI tag bid

Islamabad's claims in European Commission for basmati may hit India's exports to EU

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India is gearing up to challenge Pakistan's attempts to broaden the geographical indication (GI) tag for its Basmati rice. The extension of the GI tag for the premium variety of rice, from 14 to 48 districts in Pakistan, could have significant implications on India's export prospects to the European Union (EU).

According to people in the know, the Union commerce ministry is actively strategizing to counter Islamabad's bid at the European Commission (EC). "A comprehensive report to completely refute Pakistan's claim is being finalized through consultations with key stakeholders, including the Basmati Export Development Foundation, which is affiliated with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), alongside the Indian Agricultural

Research Institute (IARI), and association of rice exporters," one of the people said.

The development comes amid New Delhi's efforts to resolve all outstanding issues with the European Union (EU) for a bilateral free-trade agreement, with the eighth round of negotiations expected in May or early-June.

GI registration is key to access European markets, offering benefits such as tariff relief within the 27-member bloc.

India submitted its GI registration application on 20 July 2018, predating Pakistan's application on 24 August 2023. According to the standard intellectual property rights (IPR) registration process, stakeholders can oppose a registration within three months. However, while the EC is yet to reach a final decision on

India's application, it published Pakistan's application for potential opposition on 23 February 2024. The EC is now considering registration based on all the available information from both countries.

Basmati rice is grown in 81 districts in India, spanning Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh,

Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Punjab, and western Uttar Pradesh. 34 varieties of Basmati are officially recognized under Seeds Act of 1966. India

will submit its response, opposing Pakistan's claims, to the EC in the fourth week of May, a second person said.

Queries sent to a commerce ministry, spokesperson, IARI director, APEDA chairman, Pakistan embassy, and Pakistan Rice Exporters Association did not elicit any response till press time.

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