

As Kenya cultivates basmati, India feels the heat

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Kenya has begun to cultivate basmati rice, threatening the exclusivity that the Indian subcontinent, including Pakistan and Nepal, has been enjoying so far.

The development comes on the heels of Egypt planning to grow the fragrant rice.

According to Kenya's *Capital Business* website, the African nation's Bureau of Standards (KEBS) is working with research scientists and industry to tackle the rising cases of fake basmati rice.

The website quoted KEBS managing director Bernard Njiraini as saying the agency "is working with farmers, suppliers, researchers, and

government bodies to protect the local basmati rice industry".

GI TAG PROBLEMS

The approach will empower consumers to verify the authenticity and quality of the basmati rice they purchase, fostering trust and driving demand for genuine, unadulterated products. "...we can safeguard the genetic diversity of basmati rice genotypes commonly grown in Kenya, paving the way for the development of high-yielding, high-quality, and aromatic varieties..." said Sheila Kemboi, a laboratory analyst.

GI TAG PROBLEMS

As in the case of Egypt, Indian basmati could face problems if Kenya tries to export it to Europe. Though



India has filed for a geographical indication (GI) tag in Europe, it is yet to get the facility.

The European Union (EU) is suggesting to India to discuss the issue with Pakistan and come up with a joint application, which the Indian government is sternly opposed to. S Chandrasekharan, who has

written a history book on the long grain rice "Basmati Rice: The Natural History Geographical Indication", told *businessline* that Basmati rice is an expensive one that provides a higher income.

"It (cultivating basmati) is an attempt to create opportunities for Kenyan farmers by their government. India has to legally deal with this issue," he said.

APEDA TO THE RESCUE

Many countries have infringed upon India's rights to basmati but the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) has successfully defended the country's exclusivity in growing the long-grained rice.

The problem with basmati rice grown in countries such as Kenya and Egypt is that they don't have a reputation of having grown it for at least 300 years.

"In India's case, basmati rice has been grown for over 500 years now. Even Pakistan cannot claim to have grown basmati rice for so long," Chandrasekaran said.

Western nations such as the EU, Australia, the US and the UK have not given the GI tag for basmati despite India having the required "reputation".

India has registered its GI tag for basmati and APEDA initiated over 1,000 proceedings including oppositions and cancellations in over 40 countries across five continents to protect the "Basmati" name.