

India blocks Nepali ginger

The 'friendly' neighbor in the south has once again imposed an obstruction on Nepal's export of agricultural produce into their country, this time blocking entry of trucks carrying Nepali ginger.

After being stranded at Kakarbhitta check-point in Jhapa district for two weeks, five dozen trucks loaded with ginger were forced to turn back. Indian customs refused to provide them entry permits.

This recent action has evoked memories of the unofficial Indian blockade imposed on Nepal in 2015 when the country was struggling to recover from the devastating 7.8 magnitude earthquake. The quakes killed about 9,000 people, injured 22,000 and rendered millions homeless.

The economic embargo almost completely cut off the import of daily essentials, including oils, foods and medicines, items for which the landlocked country relies heavily on India. The embargo created a severe humanitarian crisis and crippled Nepal's economy.

A total of 60 trucks each loaded with 16 tons of ginger had reached Mechi Customs Office more than a week ago. However, the Indian customs on the other side refused to grant them entry, citing 'an instruction from higher authority'. The affected traders said they had no choice but to turn back.

"We took the matter up to the ministerial level time and again. But we could not export the ginger," informed Narendra Khadka, chairman of Nepal Ginger Producers and Entrepreneurs Association. "After all our attempts failed, we saw no option but to turn the stranded trucks back."

Criticizing India for blocking Nepali ginger without any reason, Khadka further said that this has greatly harmed ginger growers and exporters alike.

"The last time they stopped our ginger, they accused us of mixing it with Chinese ginger. This time, they have cited instructions from the Lucknow commissioner. Such actions are against the trade treaty," he added.

India was already importing only limited quantities of Nepali ginger. With this recent development, all imports of the country's ginger by India has come to an abrupt halt, entrepreneurs said.

Ginger entrepreneur Krishna Paudel said he recalled all his four truckloads of ginger after the cost of leaving them stranded at the customs increased day by day. Other entrepreneurs cited the same reason for their own decisions to pull back.

India has been obstructing the import of Nepali ginger since the past three years. They have routinely obstructed the import in the peak season, causing the product to decay in the trucks before it could reach the markets. This has caused millions of rupees in losses to entrepreneurs and farmers.

According to the ginger association, Nepal has managed to export around 800 truckloads of ginger to India while about 2,500 truckloads are yet to get through. As each truckload is worth about Rs 600,000; the losses will be massive if the issue is not resolved soon.

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The association has urged the prime ministers of both countries to take the initiation to resolve matters. “If the issue is not resolved soon, it could result in a loss of billions,” said Khadka.

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