

India irked by EU mango ban (Update)

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India's leading export promotion agency criticised a European ban on mango imports as unjustified on Tuesday and appealed to Brussels to overturn its decision.

The 28-member European Union imposed the ban, to take effect May 1, on import of the highly prized Alphonso mangoes, known as the "king of fruits", and four vegetables after finding unwanted pests such as "non-European fruit flies" in consignments.

"Now all consignments are undergoing certification and testing to address the concerns," Rafiq Ahmed, president of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), a government-affiliated organisation, told AFP.

"We ask the EU to look into the matter—we have taken care of the issues. Now they should lift the ban," Ahmed said.

The EU ban affects 16 million tonnes of mangoes. India, the world's largest exporter, sells up to 70,000 tonnes of various mango varieties globally.

But exporters said other buyers in the Gulf and the Asia-Pacific region are looking at buying the Indian mangoes.

An Indian commerce ministry official told AFP that New Delhi has already raised the issue with Brussels and will do so again.

The Brussels-based Europe India Chamber of Commerce (EICC) separately issued a statement saying the ban could derail slow-moving free trade talks between India underway since 2007.

"There was no scientific justification for the ban," said Sunil Prasad, EICC secretary-general, calling the move "misguided".

The EU plant health care committee announced plans last month for the ban after 207 Indian consignments of fruits and vegetables were found to be contaminated by pests. Among the vegetables banned are bitter melon and eggplant.

The EU said it acted to tackle what it called "significant shortcomings in the phytosanitary certification system."

It noted a high number of consignments arriving with "pests, mainly insects, like non-European fruit flies".

Though the prohibited goods account for under five percent of total fresh fruits and vegetables imported into the EU from India, introduction of new pests could threaten EU agriculture, the committee said.

The ban, due to run from May 1 to December 2015, has enraged some in Britain, a key market for Indian growers where London's mayor Boris Johnson supported the first-ever Indian mango festival in Trafalgar Square last year.

Indian-origin lawmaker Keith Vaz called the ban "Euro-nonsense and bureaucracy gone mad."

"Indian mangoes have been imported to Britain for centuries," Vaz said, according to the Press Trust of India news agency.

The EU ban has led to a mango surplus in Indian markets, driving down prices to fruit lovers' delight but agricultural officials are dismayed.

"The export ban will definitely affect farmers and prices... and cause a supply glut," Miling Joshi, an official at the Mango & Cashew Board told AFP.

But Rajiv Tevtiya, founder of e-commerce supply company Greencart in Mumbai, said farmers producing the finest quality Alphonsons would not lose out.

"Indian exporters now are getting good orders from New Zealand and the Gulf," Tevtiya told AFP.

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