

Why Are Americans Panic Buying Rice?

A staple food for over 3 billion people worldwide, rice plays a critical role in global food security. However, India, the largest rice exporter accounting for about 40% of the world's rice exports, recently made a momentous decision that has sent shockwaves globally.

On July 20, the Food and Consumer Affairs Ministry in India imposed a ban on the export of non-basmati white rice, citing the need to stabilize volatile retail prices in its own country. This move has had significant repercussions, particularly for the United States, where a large portion of non-basmati rice is usually imported from India.

The ban came at a critical time when unusual weather patterns wreaked havoc on rice crops in key producing areas of India. Heavy monsoon rains submerged paddy fields in northern states like Punjab and Haryana, leading to the destruction of seedlings and delaying the replanting process.

In other major rice-growing regions, farmers faced deficits in rainfall, preventing them from transplanting rice seedlings into the prepared paddy nurseries. As a result, India made the tough decision to restrict rice exports to stabilize its domestic market, inadvertently causing panic in the United States.

Indian-Americans, also known as non-residential Indians (NRIs), residing in the US, were quick to react to the news of the export ban. Fearful of potential food price inflation, they rushed to stockpile rice, leading to widespread panic buying.

Videos emerged on social media showing long lines and desperate scenes in various states, including Texas, Michigan,

New Jersey, Alabama, Ohio, Illinois and California. The frenzy was so intense that reports of consumers wrestling for bags of rice in Dallas, Texas, surfaced.

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Some retailers capitalized on the situation, dramatically hiking rice prices and making the situation worse. One report mentioned a bag of nine kilograms of rice that used to cost around \$15-16 being sold at \$ in response to the surge in demand.

Other stores implemented rationing schemes, limiting the quantity of rice each customer could purchase to ensure equitable distribution. This price gouging garnered a great deal of criticism, with consumers supporting the stores that chose to implement restrictions instead.

✘ The panic buying was not limited to the US alone. Canada also experienced similar scenes, with a grocery store in Toronto implementing a restriction of one bag of rice per family due to limited supply. The situation unfolded amidst a backdrop of growing global hunger, with the United Nations reporting that 2.4 billion people were already suffering from insufficient food, and 900 million facing severe food insecurity.

The ripple effect of India's export ban has wider implications, especially considering the termination of the deal that allowed Ukraine to ship grain through the Black Sea. With India's decision to halt non-basmati rice exports, concerns over heightening global hunger and food scarcity have intensified.

Mainstream media in the United States has mostly ignored this crisis. The lack of extensive coverage has hindered awareness of the gravity of the situation, preventing many Americans

from realizing these historic changes occurring worldwide.

As the panic buying of rice continues and the specter of food insecurity looms larger, it is essential for both the government and citizens to remain vigilant and prioritize measures that ensure food accessibility and affordability. Understanding the interconnectedness of the global food supply chain and its vulnerability to unexpected events is crucial in navigating and mitigating such crises in the future.

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