

India cuts rice exports, triggering panic-buying of food staple by some Indian expats in the U.S.

By Bobby Caina Calvan
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Chatter on one of Prabha Rao’s WhatsApp groups exploded last month when India announced that it was severely curtailing some rice exports to the rest of the world, triggering worry among the Indian diaspora in the United States that access to a food staple from home might soon be cut off.

As in any crisis situation — think bottled water and toilet paper — some rushed to supermarkets to stock up, stacking carts with bags and bags of rice. In some places, lines formed outside some stores as panic buying ensued.

But Rao, who lives near Syracuse, New York, was reassured when the proprietor of her Indian market sent out an e-mail to customers to let them know there was no need to worry: There was an ample supply of rice.

At least for now.

An earlier than expected El Niño brought drier, warmer weather in some parts of Asia and is expected to harm rice production. But in some parts of India, where the monsoon season was especially brutal, flooding destroyed some crops, adding to production woes and rising prices.

Hoping to stave off inflationary pressures on a diet staple, the Indian government imposed export bans on non-Basmati white rice varieties, prompting hoarding in some parts of the world.

The move was taken “to ensure adequate availability” and “to allay the



rise in prices in the domestic market,” India’s Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution announced July 20. Over the past year, prices have increased by more than 11%, and by 3% over the past month, the government said.

Non-Basmati white rice constitutes about a fourth of the rice exported by India.

“On WhatsApp, I got a lot of messages saying that rice was not going to be available. I think there was a lot of confusion in the beginning because, as you know, rice is very important for us,” Rao said.

“When we first heard the news, there was just mild confusion and people started panic buying because they thought that it may not be available,” she said.

There are scores of different varieties of rice, with people having their preference depending on taste and texture. India’s export ban does not apply to Basmati rice, a long-grain variety that is more aromatic.

The ban applies to short-grain rice that is starchier and has a relatively neutral flavor — which Rao says is preferable in some dishes or favored in specific regions of India, especially in southern areas of the country.

At Little India, a grocery store in New York City’s Curry Hill neighborhood in Manhattan, there was no shortage of Basmati rice and other varieties.

That wasn’t the case at other Indian groceries.

On its Facebook page, India Bazaar, an Indian grocery chain in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, told customers not to panic. “We are working hard to meet all our shoppers’ demands,” the post said.

Customers cleared shelves and waited in long lines to stockpile bags of rice, reported NBC Dallas affiliate KXAS.

“They really wanted to purchase ten, 12, 15 bags,” India Bazaar’s president, Anand

RISE IN RICE PRICES. Rice is seen on display at Little India, an Indian grocery store in New York City’s Curry Hill neighborhood. An earlier than expected El Niño brought drier, warmer weather in some parts of Asia and is expected to harm rice production. But in some parts of India, where the monsoon season was especially brutal, flooding destroyed some crops, adding to production woes and rising prices. (AP Photo/Bobby Caina Calvan)

Pabari, told the station. “It was a really crazy situation.”

India’s move came days after Russia backed out of a deal to allow Ukrainian wheat safe passage through the Black Sea, prompting warnings that the action could lead to surging prices.

Some economists say the ban might further hurt food supplies around the world, and some governments have urged the Indian government to reconsider the export ban.

At least in the United States, the supply of imported rice from India may not yet be a problem — despite the panic buying — but a long-term ban would certainly deplete that stock.

Rao says she and others will just have to adapt by purchasing rice grown in the United States or imported from other countries.

“I might have to substitute Basmati rice,” she said, “but it doesn’t taste that good, especially with South Indian dishes.”

A U.S. resident for three decades, Rao said she is accustomed to improvising.

“When we first came here, there was not even that much rice from India,” she said. “So I’ve learned to substitute, and I’m fine with the other brands that we get.”

Brain fog and other long COVID symptoms are the focus of new small treatment studies

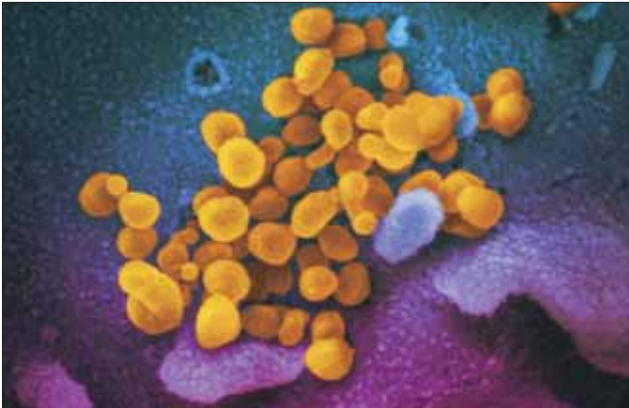
By Luran Neergaard
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is beginning a handful of studies to test possible treatments for long COVID, an anxiously awaited step in U.S. efforts against the mysterious condition that afflicts millions.

The announcement from the NIH’s \$1.15 billion RECOVER project comes amid frustration from patients who’ve struggled for months or even years with sometimes-disabling health problems — with no proven treatments and only a smattering of rigorous studies to test potential ones.

“This is a year or two late and smaller in scope than one would hope but nevertheless it’s a step in the right direction,” said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly of Washington University in St. Louis, who isn’t involved with NIH’s project but whose own research highlighted long COVID’s toll. Getting answers is critical, he added, because “there’s a lot of people out there exploiting patients’ vulnerability” with unproven therapies.

Scientists don’t yet know what causes long COVID, the catchall term for about 200 widely varying symptoms. Between 10% and 30% of people are estimated to have experienced some form of long COVID after recovering from a coronavirus infection, a risk that has dropped



somewhat since early in the pandemic.

“If I get 10 people, I get 10 answers of what long COVID really is,” U.S. Health and Human Services secretary Xavier Becerra said.

That’s why so far the RECOVER initiative has tracked 24,000 patients in observational studies to help define the most common and burdensome symptoms — findings that now are shaping multipronged treatment trials. The first two will look at:

■ Whether taking up to 25 days of Pfizer’s antiviral drug Paxlovid could ease long COVID, because of a theory that some live coronavirus, or its remnants, may hide in the body and trigger the disorder. Normally Paxlovid is

SYMPTOMS STUDIED. This undated electron microscope image made available by the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) in February 2020 shows the Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, indicated in light colors in the middle, emerging from the surface of cells, indicated in darker colors, cultured in a laboratory. NIH is opening a handful of studies to start testing possible treatments for long COVID, an anxiously awaited step in U.S. efforts against the mysterious condition. (NIAID-RML via AP, File)

used for only five days when people first get COVID-19.

■ Treatments for “brain fog” and other cognitive problems. They include Posit Science Corp.’s BrainHQ cognitive training program, another called PASC-Cognitive Recovery by New York City’s Mount Sinai Health System, and a Soterix Medical device that electrically stimulates brain circuits.

Two additional studies will open in the coming months. One will test treatments for sleep problems. The other will target problems with the autonomic nervous system — which controls unconscious functions like breathing and heartbeat — including the disorder called POTS.

A more controversial study of exercise intolerance and fatigue also is planned, with NIH seeking input from some patient groups worried that exercise may do more harm than good for certain long COVID sufferers.

The trials are enrolling 300 to 900 adult participants for now but have the potential to grow. Unlike typical

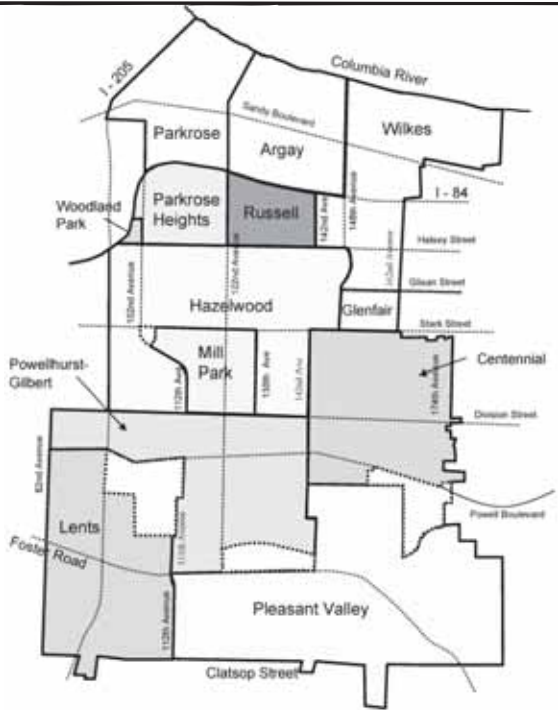
Continued on page 13

Facing Eviction?

We can help if you are a low-income tenant in the **East County of Portland** who:

- ☒ Received a termination notice
- ☒ Is losing your housing subsidy
- ☒ Has a pending eviction case

Don’t wait, **contact us today!**
Call **971-344-8949**



Give blood.

To schedule a blood donation call
1-800-GIVE-LIFE or
visit [HelpSaveALife.org](https://www.HelpSaveALife.org).

