

Sri Lanka gets India-authorized labs to smoothen food exports

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ECONOMYNEXT- India's food safety and standards authority has authorized three labs in Sri Lanka to issue food and beverage standards certificates which will not be rejected at the Indian border, a top official said.

"The Indian Food Authority has come into Sri Lanka and there are now three laboratories, where when the certification is given in Sri Lanka, is accepted at the borders in India," Chairperson of Sri Lanka's Export Development Board, Indira Malwatte said.

She said that the EDB will follow proactive measures in enhancing Sri Lanka's trade not only with India, but across other export markets as well.

Malwatte was speaking at an economic forum organized by the Institute of Policy Studies in memory of its former chief Saman Kelegama, a top trade economist who passed away last year.

The EDB in May 2018 said that it had submitted the names of five local state-owned and private sector labs for the approval of the Indian food standards regulator to allow these labs to issue certificates which won't be rejected in India.

Indian border agencies had been rejecting Sri Lankan food shipments or subjecting them to re-testing in India, which are some of the non-tariff barriers still present in trade between the two countries despite the existence of a free trade agreement (FTA), Malwatte said.

"The food sector is very important in the export basket to the Indian market," Malwatte said.

"So without complaining, without saying India is not looking at us or India is not allowing us, what we did was we spoke to the Food Authority of India and we said 'Why can't we get these products across to you?'," she said.

Tea, spices, flavoured water and nuts were listed as some of the popular export items to India in 2016, according to the EDB.

Sri Lanka is also facing difficulties in proving the rules of origin for pepper exports to India.

India had slapped a minimum import price for pepper imported from Sri Lanka, after Indian producers had protested saying that products from South East Asia were being re-exported to India through the India-Sri Lanka FTA without meeting the value-addition criteria.

India's is Sri Lanka's third largest export destination after the US and EU.