

India, Pakistan are at loggerheads over the modalities of shipment of Indian wheat to Afghanistan

Islamabad and New Delhi are at loggerheads over the modalities of shipment of Indian wheat to Afghanistan via Pakistan as the two countries are struggling to find a common strategy for humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan, officials here told Pakistani newspaper Express Tribune.

The modalities for the transportation of Indian assistance were shared with the Indian government through its mission in Islamabad.

As per modalities, Pakistan had proposed transportation of wheat on Pakistani trucks to be operated by the United Nations. The Pakistani trucks under the banner of the UN would load wheat at the Wagah crossing and then take it to Afghanistan.

The shipment charges would be paid by the Indian government. India has to complete the transportation within 30 days of the commencement of the first shipment. It is estimated that about 1,200 trucks would be needed to ship 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat.

But, according to diplomatic sources, India objected to the Pakistani modalities, insisting no conditions should be attached with humanitarian assistance.

Last week, Pakistan decided to allow India to transport 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat and other humanitarian goods to Afghanistan through the Wagah border in a move Islamabad said was made on an “exceptional basis” keeping in view the humanitarian crises in Afghanistan.

Last week, the Ministry of External Affairs said India is examining the response of Pakistan and also working with it on modalities for the supply of 50,000 metric tons of wheat and life-saving medicines to Afghanistan’

Bagchi said at the weekly media briefing that humanitarian assistance should not be subject to conditionalities. He said India has always stood by the people of Afghanistan, be it humanitarian support, or development assistance.

Contrary to Pakistan’s proposal, India has suggested that the wheat should be transported either in Indian or Afghan trucks. But Pakistan stood its ground, insisting the shipment should be carried out by Pakistani trucks under the UN banner.

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But Pakistani officials said Islamabad did not attach any conditions and added modalities were meant to ensure smooth shipment of Indian assistance.

Despite differences, one official said both sides might find a common ground and some decision is expected this week.

Afghanistan is facing a severe humanitarian crisis. A combination of a suspension of foreign aid, the freezing of Afghan government assets, and international sanctions on the Taliban, have plunged a country already suffering from high poverty levels into a full-blown economic crisis, Amnesty International said in a statement.

This comes as 22.8 million people are facing acute food insecurity and hunger, while the World Food Programme estimates that at least a million children are already suffering from acute malnutrition. According to the UN, more than USD 200 million of humanitarian aid a month is needed to avert disaster.



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