Formalin: A Banned Preservative

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- Fish laced with formalin has flooded the markets across states.
\n
- This is creating a massive health scare and the Goa government has recently banned fish supplies from other states temporarily.
\n

\n\n

Why did Goa ban fish from other states?

\n\n

\n
- Due to fears of alleged formalin contamination, officials of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) inspected fish markets in Goa.
\n
- They picked up various fish samples from various states for testing and had confirmed traces of formalin, which is a banned preservative.
\n
- The episode caused a scare, which prompted the Goa government to announce a 15 day ban on entry of fish from other states.
\n
- Border checks have also been established to inspect trucks for fish.
\n

\n\n

What is formalin?

\n\n

\n
- Formalin is a form of hydrated formaldehyde, which is used as a preservative in museums to ensure the specimens doesn’t decompose.
\n
- It is also used to harden human tissue for post mortem examinations.
\n

- It can cause gastric irritation and it also speculated to be carcinogenic, and thereby not fit for human consumption even in minimalistic proportions.
  \n
- Notably, even in laboratories, only diluted formalin is said to be used.
  \n
- Some amount of formalin is naturally formed while fish is transported with ice, but these are usually bound with tissues and not a risk.
  \n
- Contrastingly, if fish is laced externally with formalin (to prolong shelf-life), it remains free and can cause serious health issue.
  \n

\n\n

Where else was formalin detected in fish?

\n\n

  \n
- The first reports of formalin-laced fish came from Kerala, a state that consumes around 10,000 tonnes of fish every day.
  \n
- Some consumers raised the issue that the fish didn't smell and didn't decompose even when placed outside the fridge for as long as two days.
  \n
- Subsequently, Kerala government has been carrying out a storm of raids under its fish safety and hygiene campaign "Operation Sagar Rani".
  \n
- Inspections led to the seizure of about 9,600 kg of contaminated fish in Kollam district and about 6,000 Kg of fish in Palakkad district.
  \n
- Notably, Tamil Nadu officials have also been carrying out raids for the last two weeks, but laboratory tests have so far returned negative for formalin.
  \n

\n\n

Where is the formalin contamination originating from?

\n\n

  \n
- Andhra Pradesh has around 4,000 hectares of aqua-culture farms, whose output peaks during the monsoon season (when coastal fishing is banned).
  \n
- To meet the market demand, cultured fish from Andhra is to be transported widely, with sufficient quantity of ice for retarding degradation.
  \n

- But as distances are large, the fish nonetheless tends to get spoilt in transport.
\n
- This has led Andhra fish suppliers to lace fish with formalin, which retards degradation to more than 10 times its natural rate.
\n
- Notably, even a state as far as Assam found that formalin laced fish from Andhra was reaching its market (Assam has also banned outside fish now).
\n
- Also, Data from across the southern states indicates that it is the fish sourced from Andhra that is the most likely to be contaminated with formalin.
\n

\n\n

What is the way ahead?

\n\n

\n
- **Technology -** Kochi-based "Central Institute of Fisheries Technology" (CIFT) had earlier developed a detection kit for easy detection of formalin.
\n
- This has proven really effective presently and is being widely used now.
\n
- **Inspections -** Regular inspections, testing and seizures form the markets would help in reducing this malpractice.
\n
- Some states have sent official communication to Andhra Pradesh regarding the same, and which now needs to crackdown on unscrupulous suppliers.
\n

\n\n

\n
- **Infrastructure -** The most common reason for "dishonest traders" using formalin is the unavailability of good quality ice at harvest centres.
\n
- Inadequate insulation during domestic transport and lack of warehousing facility for bulk storage of fish are also additional reasons for formalin lacing.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Indian Express

\n



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering