Paper strips, mobile app to help buyers check fish quality

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WORRIED over excessive chemical contamination in raw fish? Breathe easy. The Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIIFT) is planning to bring out two affordable and easy-to-use techniques that will help people detect the presence of chemicals in fish at the time of purchase - be it at supermarkets, fish markets or at fish landing centres.

The first product will be paper test strips. When brought in contact with fish containing ammonia or formalin, the strips will change their colour. “Though not rampant, the presence of ammonia and formalin has been found in varying levels in fish sold in Kerala markets. The paper strips will help quick detection of the chemicals,” said CIIFT director C N Ravishankar.

While formalin is a toxic and carcinogenic chemical commonly used to preserve bodies in mortuaries, ammonia is used to slow down the melting of ice used to preserve fish. “They (fishermen, middlemen or vendors) sprinkle formalin solution on the fish to kill the bacteria, and this prevents it from decaying. Chemical contamination in fish is a serious issue. We have the know-how to make the paper strip, which is a chemical-laden paper. The government or the appropriate authorities can commercialise this technology and make it easily available for fish buyers through medical stores or similar shops,” said Ravishankar. There will be two separate strips - one to detect ammonia and another to detect formalin, he said.

MOBILE APP

CIIFT is also working on a mobile app to help the people check whether the fish they buy are chemically adulterated or not. “By looking at the eyes of fish, you can understand if the fish is chemically contaminated or not. So, our plan is to create a library of photos on all the species of fish, focusing on their eyes. The buyer can match the eyes of the fish in the market with the eyes in the smartphone app and easily detect if the raw fish is contaminated or not,” Ravishankar said. “The process has just commenced, and CIIFT will have to associate with commercial establishments or the government to transfer the know-how. We have just started the process of preparing the photo library,” the CIIFT director said.