Gujarat sea fishes safe to eat, find CIFT tests

Veraval Market Starts Using Special Kit To Detect Formalin

Rajkot: The paranoia over use of formalin, a known cancer-causing chemical, in preservation of fish has not only robbed people of their staple diet but has also hit the business hard in many states.

But fish lovers in Gujarat won't have so much to worry as they check whether the sea food has formalin or not with a simple test.

The main fish producing centres like Veraval have begun testing fishes using a special detection kit designed by the Central Institute of Fisheries Technology (CIFT). The kit, which costs just Rs 5, will be available in the market soon. The kits will now be used to detect formalin in fish produced in Surat.

Dr Tom C Joseph, principal scientist and in-charge of Veraval Research Center of CIFT, told TOI, "We had examined the fish produce and ice in which the bulk is preserved in the local fish market with the help of this kit last week. This was jointly done with the food and drug control administration and now this drive will be held in other big markets like Ahmedabad.

The kit, which costs just Rs 5, will be available in the market soon. Tests will be carried out in fish markets across Gujarat.

How the kit works

It requires no technical knowledge to use this kit. A paper strip with two drops of reagent solution has to be rubbed on the surface of fish skin. If the fish is contaminated with any chemical, the paper's colour changes immediately.

CIFT has stated in its inspection report that fish in Veraval market is not contaminated with formaldehyde. The popular fish species of Saurashtra coast are house mackerel, pomfret, shark, tuna, reef cod, farmed/wild caught shrimp and dry salted fish.

Formalin is derived from formaldehyde and it is a potential cancer inducing chemical, harmful for human consumption. Gopal Fofandi, president of Akhil Gujarat Machimar Mahamandal, said, "Our fish is not contaminated with any chemical, but this kit will assure customers that our fish is absolutely safe for consumption."

Production in Gujarat is nearly 600 metric tonne fish per year and almost half of this is sent across India. The state is the largest producer of marine fish in the country while Andhra Pradesh is the largest producer of farm fish.

CIFT developed this consumer-friendly kit seven months ago on the request of Kerala government following rampant complaints of adulteration.

Dr Remya S, a scientist at the research centre, said CIFT signed an MoU with Himedia Laboratories Pvt Ltd for selling this kit on commercial basis. "The state food safety department can also examine the fish by using this kit in the market as well as at check posts. Earlier, we had to send the sample for laboratory test but the sale of fish and consumption continued until the results were out. With the help of this kit, now it is possible that dangerous fish for human consumption won't go into market," she said."