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Sample Collected From Guwahati Fish Market Tests Positive For Formalin

Complaint lodged in CJM court against fish trader

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GUWAHATI: The Assam food and drugs administration department has lodged a complaint against a fish trader in the chief judicial magistrate's court here in the wake of detection of formalin, yet again in a sample collected from the Betkuchi wholesale fish market here.

Speaking to *The Shillong Times* on Wednesday, Tarun Das, senior food safety officer of the department, informed that three samples were collected from the wholesale market on July 26 of which one of them tested positive for formalin the very next day.

Formalin (formaldehyde) is a toxic and carcinogenic chemical and therefore harmful to health. It is commonly used to preserve human bodies in mortuaries and can also increase shelf life of perishable commodities.

"A case against the errant fish trader was lodged at the CJM's court on Monday as there were two holidays in between. Yesterday, we collected some more samples in the market for tests in the laboratory and we are awaiting the report by this evening," Das said.

The food safety official confirmed that as many as 100 formaldehyde detection kits procured from a German multinational pharmaceutical major have arrived here and would be put in use soon. The kits would facilitate detection of formalin in fish on the spot and in a matter of minutes, thereby allowing prompt inspection and results.

Assam had banned the entry of fish imported from outside the state for 10 days from July 11 after detection of the chemical in a sample collected from the same market where bulk of the stocks come from Andhra Pradesh.

After the ban was lifted from the fourth week of July, trucks from the southern state had trickled into Assam despite restrained buying and stocking of the *challani* variety from wholesalers and retailers here.

Now, it remains to be known what action the authorities plan to take, be it imposing harsh penalties on traders violating rules or re-imposing the ban.

Assam minister of state for health, Pijush Hazarika had subsequently said that stern action would be taken against traders found selling fish laced with formalin.

According to provisions of the Food Safety Act, a trader found guilty of selling stocks harmful to human health may face imprisonment up to seven years and a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh.