

# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## Will extend fish import ban if need arises, says Parrikar

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Panaji: Chief minister Manohar Parrikar on Monday tried to end the formalin in fish issue and assured Goans of availability of safe fish by expressing his willingness to extend the ban on import of fish “if the prevailing circumstances warrant the same”. He also said a robust mechanism would be put in place to check imported fish before lifting the ban. “The government is ready to consider extending this ban for a further period in the interest of the health of the Goans. We will not allow formalin-laced fish to enter the state. We will not play with the health of people,” he told the assembly. On July 18, a week after the food and drug administration’s (FDA) spot test found formalin in fish, the government had banned import of fish for 15 days. The chief minister, for the first time, also admitted that there was nothing called a permissible limit for formaldehyde. Contradicting his own ministers and the FDA, Parrikar said: “...the laboratory report mentioned that the formaldehyde content was within the “permissible limit”, which is a misnomer, as there is no permissible limit specified under FSSAI regulations.” The controversy of formalin in fish was kicked off by Parrikar’s cabinet colleague and his ally Vijai Sardesai, who even before the FDA test results were declared, tweeted that there was no formalin present in fish, which was contradicted by the enforcement agency that said formalin was present “within permissible limits”. The government later claimed formalin was inherent in fish and what was found by FDA was within permissible limits. Before the ban kicked in, TOI had front-paged scientists and experts busting government’s claims that formalin was inherent in fish and there was a permissible limit for cancer-causing chemical formalin. Parrikar also dismissed concerns over the finding of the FDA and said the results could not be manipulated, but there “may have been some error”. Though he said the government was willing to consider extending the ban, he gave a broad hint that the state was not in favour of a permanent ban on import of fish.

“If we permanently ban imports, then we have to eat fish at triple the price. The solution is to put up a robust mechanism to check the fish. Let us not completely destroy the state economy and deprive the common man of fish,” he said. Parrikar said FDA along with directorate of fisheries and police “shall continue to monitor the quality of fish by carrying out routine and periodic inspections at the major markets of Margao, Panaji and Mapusa” even after the ban is lifted. “What is required is actually strengthening the FDA with additional equipment and necessary support... I will also provide them more manpower,” he said.

He also said, “Criminal action as per the Food Safety and Standards Act shall be initiated against the concerned fish dealer.”

In an oblique reference to his cabinet colleagues that includes allies Vijai Sardesai and Rohan Khaunte and his own party member Vishwajit Rane, Parrikar said by trying to score political points, “We are spoiling the image of Goa.”

He also said despite the government banning import of fish before the start of the assembly session on Thursday, the opposition did not allow the House to function for two consecutive days. Congress, demanding an adjournment motion, had disrupted the assembly proceedings. Urging all members to refrain from politicising the issue, Parrikar requested them “to support the government on the action taken and proposed to be taken for addressing this issue”.