

Delhi High Court favours jail terms for using chemicals to ripen fruits

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Use of pesticides and chemicals to ripen fruits amounts to poisoning the consumer, the Delhi High Court has observed and said invoking penal provisions against the culprits would have a deterrent effect.

“Using chemicals like calcium carbide to ripen mangoes is like poisoning somebody. Why should the Indian Penal Code be not invoked against them? Send such persons to jail, even if for 2 days and it would have a deterrent effect,” a bench of Justices GS Sistani and AJ Bhambani said while hearing a PIL initiated by the court to monitor use of pesticides on fruits and vegetables.

Fiat to FSSAI

The bench asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) whether calcium carbide was still being used to ripen fruits like mangoes, and sought the presence of its Chief Executive Officer to assist it on the next date of hearing.

The court also asked the Ministry of Agriculture as to whether any kit was available for consumers to themselves test for calcium carbide in their homes. The ministry said no such kit was available as the presence of calcium carbide can only be tested in laboratories with the help of proper equipment and additional chemicals.

The Delhi government, represented by its additional standing counsel Naushad Ahmed Khan, told the court that it has been picking up samples from markets in the national capital for testing and also carrying out awareness drives. It also told the court that some of the samples were tested and no chemicals were found and the results of other samples were awaited.

Apart from the PIL initiated by the court on its own, it is also hearing two other pleas by private individuals seeking directions to the authorities to curb the use of pesticides and other chemicals on food products, especially the agricultural produce, coming into the national capital.

Excessive pesticides

According to a report filed by amicus curiae Rajul Jain earlier, due to excessive usage of pesticides in fruits and vegetables, “various countries have banned the import of Indian vegetables and fruits and many more were under scrutiny.”

The high court had initiated the issue on its own after an NGO had found that vegetables and fruits sold in the Delhi markets contained poisons capable of causing cancer and harming the nervous system and liver.

The court has in the past suggested several measures to curb adulteration of eatables, especially fruits and vegetables, like large-scale testing and sending back contaminated food products to manufacturers or farmers.