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Raids on Balangir fish markets

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Public health officials collect samples of fishes from Rugudipara market in Balangir on Wednesday. Telegraph picture

Balangir: Fish markets in the town wear a deserted look after public health department officials raided them and collected samples for sending it to the food testing laboratory in Bhubaneswar to ascertain whether those contained formalin.

Hardly any traders or customers could be spotted in the markets on Wednesday.

District public health officials, led by the district food safety officer, raided the Rugudipada fish market, the ones along Brahminpada road and the daily markets.

The officials talked to the traders and collected samples from them. However, there were only few traders, who came to the market on Wednesday. Balangir district food safety officer Arun Kumar Chaterjee said they were acting according to the food safety commissioner's direction.

"The administration has been asked to collect the sample of fish sold in the market and send it to the food testing laboratory in Bhubaneswar. Formalin is a chemical applied on fishes to preserve it for longer period, and their consumption is injurious to health. Based on the food laboratory reports, further action will be taken," Chaterjee said.

Fish trader Purnima Behera said she usually sold local fishes, which had great demand. "We usually sell local fishes, which customers prefer the most. We go for fishes from Andhra Pradesh only when the local fishes are not available," she said.

She further said they had no problem if the administration conducted raids or collect samples. "We have absolutely no problem as we hardly sell fishes procured from Andhra Pradesh," she said.

The customers, however, are alarmed and have stayed away from consuming fish.

Local resident Tarini Sahu said fish lovers of Balangir stopped eating fish after the news of the presence of cancer-causing forming had broke out last week. "Like me, most of the fish customers have stopped eating it. This has led to recession in the fish markets of Balangir," he said.

On Monday, the food safety commissioner, in a letter, directed all the district public health officers-cum-designated officers and the state's civic bodies to collect fish samples and send it to the laboratory.