

OPINION COLUMN

THE LEGAL ASPECTS RELATING FOOD COLOURS IN PAKISTAN

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Colour is as common in our environment as the air, we breath. We are not aware of it. Whereas, we use colours for identification. Likewise food colours are important to identify foods and quality control.

Some decades ago, in USA and European community colours containing lead dichromate were used to dye food. Now-a-days, in Pakistan the situation is far better. However, here is a common practice to use sub-standard colours which contain heavy metals. Acid and basic colours are used which are not safe for human.

There is a need that the Government should revise West Pakistan Pure Food Rules, 1965 and take necessary measures to implement them. I have suggestions which are as follows:

1. Sec. 4 of West Pakistan Pure Food Rules, 1965 should be amended.
2. Food Violet 2, Food Violet 3, Food Green 1, Food Green 3, should be deleted from the permitted list of food colours.
3. Food Yellow 13 (E104), Food Red 3 (E122), Food Red 7 (E124), Food Red 10 (E128), Food Red (E129), and Food Green 4 (E142) should be added in permitted list of food colours.
4. Sec. 11 of the rules should be amended, the word food additive should be added here and it is to be read as "Any article of food and food additive shall be considered as injurious to health and unfit for human consumption within the meaning of Sec. 5".

Now, I would like to discuss about Amaranth. In 1968, 1969 and 1970, reports of studies in USSR raised concerns about possible carcinogenic and reproductive effects of Amaranth and other food colours. Scientists from the USA, Canada, UK, the WHO and the FAO showed this work to be faulty because no tumours were reported. This report was published in BBRA Reports in 1972 by British Industrial Biological Research Association under head Significance of Recent Studies on Amaranth. Canadian Government released a press note on February 2, 1976 about the safety of Amaranth, too. However, FDA terminated Amaranth from the approved list on February 12, 1976 which was presumed a political decision. Amaranth is still permitted in Europe as a food colour (E123).

In my opinion, Amaranth is safe for human consumption and a cheap source for colouring foods having a good tintorial value.