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Food security activist warns of presence of carcinogen in food

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By Tushar Kaushik
Express News Service

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BENGALURU: A Canada-based food security activist has raised concerns on the widespread use of a controversial substance found in herbicides, claiming that the substance had caused adverse health effects, especially in North America. He has rung alarm bells, saying that extensive food tests need to be conducted in India to check the presence of this substance, called glyphosate — arguably believed to be carcinogenic — in food.

Tony Mitra, a food security activist residing in Vancouver, Canada, has been working to raise awareness on the harmful effects of glyphosate - a substance found in herbicides worldwide. The concern for Indians, he said, was that glyphosate-based herbicides were also used in India, and large amounts of pulses were imported from Canada, where he claimed glyphosate had caused the most harm.

Monsanto, a US-based agrochemical company, which was recently acquired by the firm Bayer, is among the largest manufacturers of herbicides that contain glyphosate. On Sunday, Mitra explained the biological mechanism by which glyphosate harms humans. He said glyphosate stop the microbes in our intestines from synthesizing amino acids, which are essential for digestion of food.

He said newborns who were affected with the disorder of Anancephaly could be traced to consumption of glyphosate. In India, as per reports, Maharashtra wants to ban herbicides containing glyphosate and is waiting for directions from the Centre. In the US, a terminally-ill cancer patient has filed a lawsuit against Monsanto, claiming that he got the disease due to contact with the herbicide Roundup, in which glyphosate is the active ingredient, over two years.

Reports claim thousands of such lawsuits have been filed against Monsanto. "Monsanto scientists have known the ill-effects for a long time but haven't disclosed it," alleged Mitra. He urged Indian citizens to carry out their own independent research in this regard. The New Indian Express tried contacting Monsanto India for its comments, but in vain, and questions sent via e-mail remained unanswered till the paper went to press.

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