

# MAIL TODAY

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## Strict action against milk adulterators can stop menace: Supreme Court

It has agreed to the view of the court earlier that the present penalty of six months in jail "was hardly a deterrent" for the menace, which is most common in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

Nearly A month after Science and Technology Minister Harsh Vardhan told Parliament that two out of three Indians drink milk laced with detergent, caustic soda, urea and paint, the Supreme Court on Tuesday said only prompt action against milk adulterators can stop the menace.

"You are asking for life imprisonment for milk adulterators. But we would say even the present maximum term of six months jail would be sufficient if the violators are caught promptly, booked and prosecuted. It can create a fear. If they are not caught and prosecuted what do we do? These are enforcement issues. We are not saying adulteration is not going on. It is rampant.

But what do we do? Stop sale of urea? If the centre has some plans, let us wait for it", a bench headed by chief justice TS Thakur told Anurag Tomar, the lawyer for petitioner who filed a PIL on the issue. Meanwhile, the Centre told the court that it has formed a high-level committee to consider whether or not to make the offence of milk adulteration punishable by life imprisonment.

It has agreed to the view of the court earlier that the present penalty of six months in jail "was hardly a deterrent" for the menace, which is most common in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh.

An affidavit in the court by Rakesh Nayal, a senior official in the Union Health Ministry said the panel, headed by RK Jain, secretary of the National Disaster

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Management Authority, and representatives from Food Safety and Standard Authority of India will take a decision within three months.

The court had on December 12, 2014 taken serious exception to the Centre's refusal to amend the law to make the offence punishable with life term. "What are you doing about it? In March we had given an ultimatum to the Centre to inform us if you are amending the law and we are now in December," the Bench said when Tomar pointed out the delay. "After perusing the reports submitted by various states, prima-facie we are of the opinion that milk is being laced with contaminants and the practice is going unabated.

"The Centre must come out with necessary amendment to the Act with all seriousness to curb adulteration. We hope the government will take appropriate decision during the winter session of Parliament," the court had said.

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