

India court orders 2-month ban on pesticide, study

May 15 2011, By NIRMALA GEORGE , Associated Press

(AP) -- India's top court temporarily banned production and sale of a pesticide widely used in the country so its effects on humans and wildlife can be studied.

[Endosulfan](#) causes [nerve damage](#) and is banned in 80 countries, while others have announced phase-outs over the next few years. India produces about 70 percent of the world's supply to control pests on fruit, vegetable, tea, coffee, cotton and other crops.

The Supreme [Court](#) ordered a two-month ban countrywide Friday and ordered an expert report within eight weeks on how the pesticide affects people and the environment.

The court acted on a petition filed by a political group from the southern state of Kerala, citing an increase in deaths and birth deformities in the state's Kasargode district where endosulfan was aerially sprayed on the cashew crop.

The Kerala state government, which supported the petitioners, says scores of people have died and hundreds have been born with deformities in Kasargode, where aerial spraying has been done for more than 20 years.

Chief Justice Sarosh Homi Kapadia ordered the government to convene an expert panel to study endosulfan and recommend whether it should be banned entirely or phased-out.

Representatives of 127 countries who met in Geneva last month agreed to add endosulfan to the U.N.'s list of pollutants and set a 2012 deadline to end use of the pesticide.

But India, one of the world's biggest users of endosulfan, wrested an 11-year phase-out period saying this would give its scientists time to develop safer alternatives.

Indian farmers are opposed to a ban on endosulfan which they say is a cheap, readily available pesticide. Their argument has been buttressed by big pesticide manufacturers who contend the anti-endosulfan campaign is being pushed by multinational chemical companies.

However, the court said it did not want further damage to people or the environment from continued use of the pesticide.

"We don't want a single child to suffer" the hazards posed by endosulfan, Press Trust of India quoted Justice Kapadia as saying.

The court said if the expert committee concluded endosulfan was not hazardous the ban would be lifted.

Endosulfan already is banned in the United States, European Union and Australia.

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