

7 March 2008

By : J. CHOW, Kuala Lumpur

I REFER to your reports on the trend of allowing illegal dyes and preservatives to be used in our food industry ("So what's safe to eat now?" - NST, Dec 30).

After reading the articles, I developed a habit of checking with food vendors about the source and preparation of food that they sell. Not surprisingly, many of them were unco-operative.

However, the few that were co-operative provided shocking revelations. My regular pasar malam fruit seller said that the whitish powder found on papayas were chemicals used to prevent wasps from depositing their eggs within the papayas.

Untreated papayas, he said, contained wasp larvae when the eggs hatched.

Mangoes from a nearby country always look first-grade and without many spots on them. According to the fruit seller, some of these mangoes have been dipped in chemicals.

Farm workers will visit every tree, position a container of chemicals below a fruit, and immerse the fruit completely, before going to the next fruit. Lychee, longan and durian from the same country are also thought to have been treated with chemicals.

Unfortunately, local farmers have resorted to using chemicals, too.

And it is not just the fruits. A restaurant owner friend once told me that a relative who manufactures a brand of oyster sauce told him to avoid buying and consuming the oyster sauce that they themselves manufacture.

The reason? It has excessive preservatives.

I hope the Health Ministry will take this matter seriously. Their enforcement officers should realise that they and their families are consuming the same food that may contain dangerous substances.