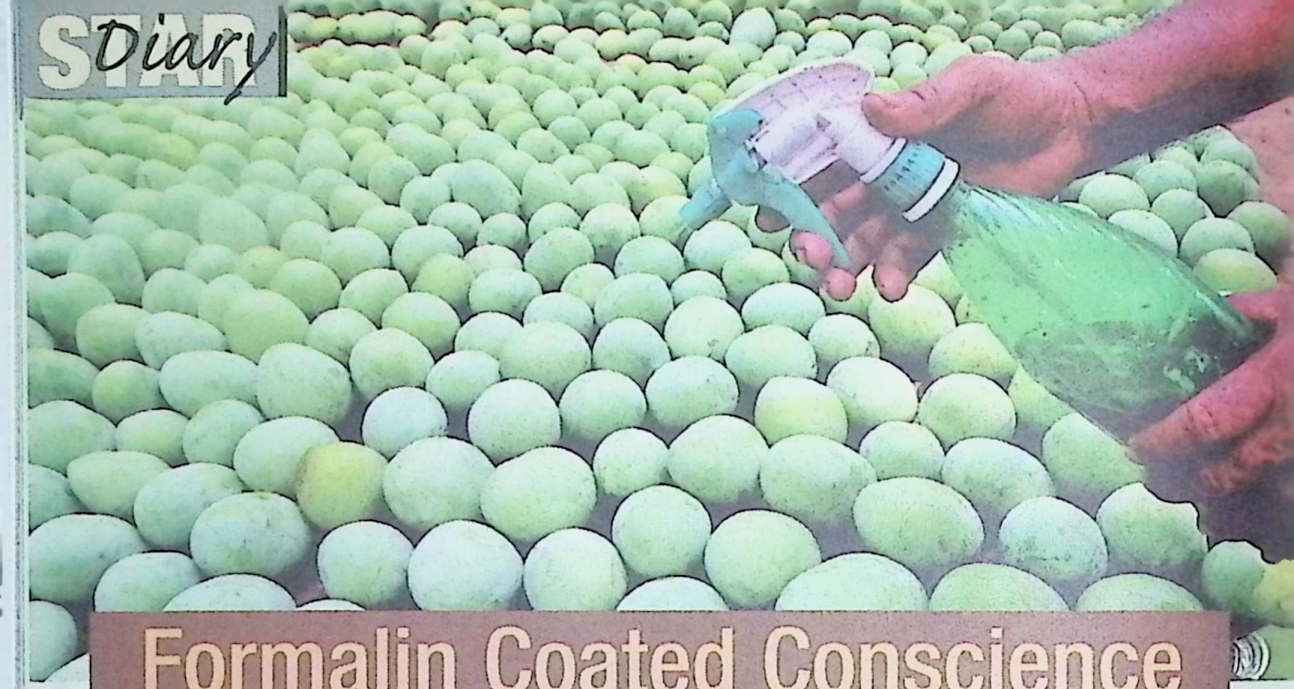


Formalin Coated Conscience

A few days back I bought some mangoes from a roadside stall. The vendor assured me that the mangoes were fresh and free of formalin and were sweet. After having one of the mangoes, I discovered that it tasted sour and left a foul taste in my mouth. I left the mangoes in the open to see whether it contained any formalin, and my fears were proven right when after a couple of days, instead of rotting, the mangoes looked the same as they did two days back. I realized that the mangoes were ripened using harmful chemicals for the vendors to maximize their profits. Nothing seems to hurt our conscience anymore, as even this seems to be safeguarded by formalin!

Zonaed Emran
Via Email

THE PLIGHT OF A MIGRANT

Last week, while completing a routine work at my office, a man approached me, asking me to check his bank account, as he had not used it in a long time, and now wished to know the details of his account. After giving it a thorough look, I informed the man that his account was inactive, and he'd need to submit a request to reactivate it if he wished to continue accessing it. He returned the next day with the required documents. While conversing with him, I found out that he was an expatriate, who returned from South Africa after eight years. Out of curiosity, I asked him how he ended up working in South Africa. He was quiet for a while before answering that he had to leave the country when he couldn't find any other alternative to earn a sustainable livelihood. A relative had informed him that he could earn a good sum in South Africa but it would be risky to go there and they'd have to do things in an illegal manner. He then contacted "agents" who warned them that he'd have to be ready to take risks, as he could either die or be put in prison. He agreed to all the conditions, and was put in a group of other illegal migrants who wanted to try their luck in South Africa. They first were taken to Dubai and then shifted to Kenya, before being moved to Mozambique. They had to go hungry most days, and were in constant fear of getting caught. Finally, one fateful day, one of the agents, told them that they would take the risk of walking to the border of South Africa that very night. They were taken into a forest and divided into four groups, and were informed by the agents that they had to walk for five days at a stretch inside the forest to reach South Africa. They didn't have enough food or water on them, and were losing energy by the hour. On the third day, three of them were arrested by the border guards while the rest fled and hid in a cave. After several days of such torture, they finally reached their destination. His eyes started watering as he shared his experiences with me. He says that he is settled there now and has even set up a business that allows him to take care of his family but he can never forget the miserable days he spent trying to get this better life. I felt really sad for the poor guy after hearing his story. Migrant workers like him have to risk their lives and freedom to seek their fortune far away from their homes. They send back money to their family, thereby increasing our remittance flow but we hardly do anything for them. These "invisible" people continue to work hard and send money back home but are still neglected by their own society.

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