

Bangladesh to opt for Bt brinjal, Indian activists skeptical

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The National Committee on Biosafety (NCB), Bangladesh which is the country's regulatory authority to approve genetically modified crops, has given its approval to the commercial cultivation of the Bt brinjal. The approved varieties developed by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) with the help of technology, actually transferred by the India based Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company (Mahyco).

This surely means a good news for Indian industry which of late has been disappointed by the continuous moratorium on the Br crops. Once Bangladesh allows cultivation of GM food crops, the existing moratorium on Bt Brinjal in India will have no meaning as the transgenic variety of this popular vegetable can easily seep into Indian side through porous border. Hence, government might have to by default agree to the industry demands in the long run as in case of Bt cotton, which now is counted among the big success stories in agricultural space. This might also as well, become a good case of argument in Supreme Court, where there is an ongoing case being battled out between pro and anti am stakeholders.

At the same time, the anti-GM food groups based in Delhi have sought government's intervention under international convention and protocol to halt the Bangladesh from doing so. The organizations believe that the move may endanger rich biodiversity of entire South Asia.

Raising their concerns, the civil society groups and NGOs like Greenpeace and Coalition for GM Free India have said that it was the same genetically modified Brinjal which was rejected in India and Philippines. "After the failure of getting this risky Bt Brinjal released in India and Philippines, the GM industry has now turned to Bangladesh. Once the transgenic variety of this vegetable gets clearance in Dhaka, it will automatically enter India illegally through porous border", said Rajesh Krishnan, co-convenor of the Coalition for GM Free India.

The activists have asked the government of India that it must take adequate measures under the Article 25 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to stop any such trans-boundary movement of the GM crop in the eventual case of Bt Brinjal cultivation

in Bangladesh.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to which both India and Bangladesh are parties to, recommends that all measures should be put in place to protect centres of origin and diversity of crops. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, an instrument of the CBD, was specifically created for safeguarding biodiversity, including human health, from either intentional or unintentional trans-boundary movement of living modified organisms.