

Elections in sight, can we really expect policy makeover on GEAC, GM crops?

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The change of guard in the environment ministry might turn out to be no ordinary event. It is being reported that the prime minister who was vocal about the science being on priority than unchecked activism, has finally taken a call on the GM crops. Going by that India's newly appointed minister for environment, Veerappa Moily is expected to take a technology/industry friendly stand. His ministry alongwith agriculture ministry might very soon file a joint affidavit in the Supreme Court of India to allow the GM crop trials in confined zones. The requirement of no objection certificate from states too might be done away with.

It is important to note that the previous ministers, Ms Jyanti Natarajan (predecessor) and Mr Jairam Ramesh despite being petitioned on numerous occasions, had shied away from taking any industry friendly measure.

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) that hasn't met since last two years (except a meeting in April, 2013 where the key members were missing and even the minutes were not made public), is expected to soon come back to table to deliberate and discuss the fate of the piled up files seeking approvals. The sources told BioSpectrum that the approvals to atleast about 35-40 products on priority basis might happen soon.

Earlier, the Maharashtra government in December, 2013 granted NOCs to 28 applications from seven companies for confined field trials. Despite the opposition from within the state government, the chief minister of the state decided to give the nod on case to case basis. The NOCs have been granted to transgenic varieties of rice, wheat, maize, brinjal and cotton. The companies granted clearances include Monsanto India, Mahyco, Bayer Bio Science, Syngenta Bio Sciences, Pioneer Overseas Corporation, Dow Agro Sciences India and Ankur Seeds. The government's Central Institute for Cotton Research has also been given an NOC. The move has received all the support from union agriculture ministry.

Meanwhile Ms Aruna Rodrigues, an anti-GM activist whose PIL in the supreme court is under hearing, was quoted as saying that the prime minister has an agenda to foster biotechnology with United State support. "If the prime minister has overruled Jayanthi Natarajan and appointed a new environment minister to do his bidding, then science goes out of the window," she

mentioned in her statement to media.

The anti-GM activists are expected to oppose any such move both in courts and on streets. With the parliament set to meet in February, 2014 for the last time, it remains interesting to see how things turn out for the crucial BRAI bill and the GEAC.