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Thu, 26 Feb-15; Mint - Delhi; Size : 97 sq.cm.; Page : 6

GEAC to look into GM crop trial proposals

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NEW DELHI

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) of the ministry of environment and forests is set to consider new proposals to approve field trials of genetically modified (GM) crops on 28 February, even as the ministry is discussing the proposals with organizations opposed to such trials, including those affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) ideological parent.

"The meeting of GEAC is there on 28 February. We only want that all technology options should be available with us... But whether we use them commercially or not is a different thing," according to an environment ministry official, requesting anonymity.

"Across India, there are 20 crops at various stages of trials. But it depends on project proponents and government, if they want to expand it commercially. For instance, trials for genetically modified brinjal have been in moratorium. But GM cotton is allowed and research in it too is still going on," the official said.

The official said that there are nearly a dozen such proposals up for consideration but declined to give details.

The meeting comes amid hectic efforts by environment minister Prakash Javadekar to bring all those opposing GM crops on board.

His task, however, has not been easy because those who have been vociferously opposing it are bodies affiliated to the RSS.

Several such meetings have already taken place where Javadekar along with experts met representatives of the two RSS affiliates, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, a farmers' association.