

PM Modi bets on GM crops for second green revolution

NEW DELHI On a fenced plot not far from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home, a field of mustard is in full yellow bloom, representing his government's reversal of an effective ban on field trials of genetically modified (GM) food crops.

The GM mustard planted in the half-acre field in the grounds of the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in New Delhi is in the final stage

of trials before the variety is allowed to be sold commercially, and that could come within two years, scientists associated with the project say.

India placed a moratorium on GM aubergine in 2010 fearing the effect on food safety and biodiversity. Field trials of other GM crops were not formally halted, but the regulatory system was brought to a deadlock. But allowing GM

crops is critical to Modi's goal of boosting dismal farm productivity in India, where urbanisation is devouring arable land and population growth will mean there are 1.5 billion mouths to feed by 2030 — more even than China.

Starting in August last year, his government resumed the field trials for selected crops. "Field trials are already on because our mandate is to find

out a scientific review," environment minister Prakash Javadekar said last week.

Modi was a supporter of GM crops when he was CM of Gujarat, the time when GM cotton was introduced in the country and became a huge success. Launched in 2002, Bt cotton, which produces its own pesticide, is the country's only GM crop and covers 95 percent of India's cotton culti-

vation of 28.7 million acres.

2ND GREEN REVOLUTION

Largely agricultural India became self-sufficient in foodgrains after the launch of the Green Revolution in the 1960s, when it introduced high-yielding seed varieties and the use of fertiliser and irrigation. The challenge now is to replicate that success in edible oils and vegetables, which are

increasingly in demand. India imports about 60 percent of its edible oil needs at an annual cost of up to \$10 billion.

Greenpeace however remains opposed. "The government's rush with field trials without addressing loopholes in the regulatory mechanism is a matter for serious concern," said Manvendra Singh Inaniya, a campaigner for Greenpeace India. **REUTERS**

