

# GEAC to hold second meeting on GM mustard tomorrow

New Delhi, Feb 4 (PTI) Biotechnology regulator GEAC is holding a second meeting tomorrow to discuss the much-debated genetically modified (GM) mustard seed issue despite strong opposition. The Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) had met once last month to hear views of the technology developer Deepak Pental, a scientist at the Delhi University. Later, a sub-panel of GEAC had met on February 2 on the matter. The Environment Ministry has received a proposal for commercial cultivation of a GM hybrid variety of the mustard plant developed by the university's Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP). "The second meeting of GEAC is scheduled for tomorrow. The meeting will listen to the views of the sub-committee on the GM mustard proposal," sources said. Anti-GM farmer union bodies, including Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), have been demanding to cancel such meetings on the issue. "Environment Minister **Prakash Javadekar** is allowing GEAC to hold its meeting to process the GM mustard application on Friday (February 5). It makes us wonder what and wherefrom the need and pressure are emerging from," said a joint statement issued by 13 farmer unions yesterday.

They had said the meeting has been scheduled despite opposition to the GM mustard from major crop-growing states, including BJP-rules ones. Besides the farmers unions, there is stiff opposition from NGOs against GM mustard, which is seen to jeopardise traditional varieties and leave farmers dependent solely on private companies for such seeds. Former Union health minister Anbumani Ramadoss and several farmer groups such as Bhartiya Kisan Union, Bhartiya Kisan Sangh and the Right to Food Campaign have made representations to the government opposing GM mustard. Biotechnology industry body ABLE-AG is of the view that the regulator, GEAC, should at least be allowed to do a scientific review of the technology before firming up its mind. According to ABLE-AG, GM mustard – which has the potential of increasing yield by 25 per cent – is required in India as the country is still dependent on edible oil imports. India's rapeseed-mustard seed production stood at 63.09 lakh tonnes in 2014-15 crop year (July-June). This is the first proposal that has come up before the NDA government after the previous government had put a moratorium on commercial cultivation of Bt Brinjal in 2010. Currently, Bt cotton is the only GM crop allowed for commercialisation.