

NATIONAL

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18 GM seed trials are on: Centre

- Special Correspondent



— PHOTO: PTI

Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar and Maharashtra Governor C Vidyasagar Rao release a document during the 'India Biodiversity Awards 2016' for best conservation efforts, in Mumbai on Monday.

Panel set up by Environment Ministry to take a call on GM mustard.

Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar has said the use of genetically modified (GM) technology for seeds is important for improving agricultural productivity and food security. He said 18 field trials, testing various kinds of GM seeds, were under way but the government would take a considered view on releasing genetically modified mustard.

GM mustard, likely to be the first food-related transgenic crop and developed as part of a research collaboration involving scientists at Delhi University, sits at an inflexion point with critics alleging that such technologies are unfit for human consumption and proponents arguing that such technology is critical for India's future.

"India's agricultural productivity is among the lowest [among nations] ... science and technology has to be encouraged for this," Mr. Javadekar said at a press event organised to mark two years of the National Democratic Alliance regime.

Committee set up

The Environment Ministry had constituted a Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee comprising biotechnologists, ecologists and sociologists to take a call on GM mustard.

Mr. Javadekar said the government was mooting a new Bill to impose strict fines and even jail terms for those violating industrial pollution norms. A senior official in the Ministry told *The Hindu* that the Civil Penalties Bill was in the process of being reviewed after a round of comments and would soon be presented to the Cabinet for approval.

Last week, Mr. Javadekar said his Ministry — which had a system of electronically monitoring industrial units along the Ganga and noting those that exceeded prescribed norms — had sued five municipalities in Uttar Pradesh in the National Green Tribunal for not implementing sewage treatment measures.

