

Biotech GM Seeds Buccaneers destroy India's Rice Economy

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The India Government is firmly under control of buccaneers of bio-technology and spurious Life Sciences multinational corporations. Despite rules to the contrary, GM experiments have been going on across India with the complicity of the Indian Government. Most importantly, the attack is now on rice.

India is a centre of origin for rice and the centre for diversity for rice genes, in the same way as Mexico is for corn. It is therefore much more than just a rice country. This makes the Government's cavalier attitude to India's Non-GM status for rice, one of irresponsible criminal negligence. In embarking on high-risk field trials of GM-rice, it exposes our rice farmers to contamination by GM including transgenic contamination of wild species and the rice seed stock. If we Indians lose control over local rice seeds we lose our right to food and nutrition. We lose our sovereignty.

Has the Government exercised due diligence?

In granting permission for field trials, the Government of India has failed to protect the people's interest and health. The Supreme Court of India [SC] in its interim order in matter of a Public Interest Litigation [PIL] number 260 of 2006 [1st May 2006] had directed that an inter-ministerial "Genetic Engineering Approvals Committee" [GEAC] be formed and all applications for field trails be routed via GEAC. This does not imply that the SC had given a carte blanche to GEAC to approve field trials; rather, the directive was to prevent one department [the Department of Biotechnology] from taking unilateral decisions and bring in some discipline.

However, in the '67th Meeting of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee' held on 22.05.2006, the GEAC brushed aside all such concerns and in utter defiance of the spirit of the Order it has rubberstamped an astonishing 91 GM products for multi-location trials [MLTs]

91 approvals in one meeting.

Which forced the Supreme Court to pass another order on 20th September, 2006:

[Whilst it is] not inclined to direct stoppage of field trials. At the same time, [the Supreme Court] deem it appropriate to direct the GEAC to withhold the approvals till further directions

are issued by this Court on hearing all concerned. [Record of Proceedings, Item No 9, Writ Petition No 260 of 2006; the Supreme Court of India]

Not only that approvals have been rushed through in anticipation of a possible full spectrum ban on field trial in India, activists have been stone walled from obtaining information on locations and type of seeds being tested. It is only after petition under Right to Information [RTI Act of 2005] were filed that some information has been revealed by the Department of Biotechnology.

Thus, the big seed companies [in this instance Monsanto, operating through its Indian Joint Venture partners Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Corporation or Mahyco] have committed crimes against humanity with full connivance of officials of the Department of Biotechnology and members of GEAC [which means several Ministries are also involved, chiefly, the Minister of Agriculture & the Ministry of Environment & Forest].

This is a crime against the people of India and against India's farmers because these approvals have been given knowing the fact that in the last two years, 70% of the farmer suicides in the Maharashtra belt are Bt cotton farmers suicides.

"During the latter part of April, the Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA) uncovered deadly toxic reaction in sheep and goats in Warangal in AP from grazing in Bt cotton fields in Feb/March, post the last cotton harvest of 2005-2006. Local shepherds estimate the total mortality for the area to be around 10,000 dead sheep and goats." [Page 4, Application for interim order, in the SC of India, No 260 of 2006]

We do not care how many acres have been planted. We do know that six varieties of Bt rice are under open field trials. These are: MRP 5305 Bt., MRP5319Bt., MRP 5401 Bt., MRP5445Bt., MRP 5629 Bt., and MRP5631 Bt.

Whilst Bt rice trials have been approved in 10 out of India's 25 states, we suspect that the total area where GE field trails have been slipped in, without knowledge of the poor farmers who rented their lands, could be significant.

This is not a new war

The United States of America declared a war on Indian rice [and food security] way back in the early 1960s when India's No 1 scientist mole, Dr M.S. Swaminathan, stole the gene bank of rice, evolved over decades by Dr Riccharia, and passed it over to the Americans. How many genetic varieties have been stolen? No one really knows.

Swaminathan was the main dramatis personae in what is known as "the great[est] gene robbery" in the history of mankind. [See, "The Great Gene Robbery", by Dr Claude Alvarez, The Illustrated Weekly of India, March 23-April 5, 1986]

India had 120,000 varieties of rice seeds; today, no more than 50 are available. This is United States' war on genetic diversity, ably supported by scientist-criminals like MS Swaminathan. And the worst crime of the Indian Government is to have these criminals head Agriculture Policy of India. At age 75, Swaminathan lives to lord it over many Expert

Committees, including crucial ones in the Ministry of Agriculture. The deadly tentacles of this hydra-headed monster extend in many ministries of the Government of India. From early 1960s, Swaminathan has been the front of the Rockefellers, implementing their agenda with full support of the US Government. [See: www.GMWatch.org]

Emboldened by a deliberately errant Indian Regulator, which is malfunctioning with intent and deliberation to support a pro GE agenda, and the open support of USAID, the GM seeds producers are furthering the agenda of destroying India's food sovereignty and food security knowing fully well that GE seeds do not enhance productivity [yield], which is what Indian farmers need.

"For example, the USAID-backed initiative, Agricultural Biotechnology Support Project-II (ABSP-II), is based and directed from Cornell. ABSP partners have included Asgrow, Monsanto, and Pioneer Hi-Bred. Promoting GM is, of course, an official part of USAID's remit - one of its roles being to "integrate GM into local food systems." [Ibid]

The Trojan horse of GE seeds in India

That war has been taken to new heights by Monsanto. Few know that Mahyco is the Trojan horse through which Monsanto is slipping in GM seeds. Monsanto's website says:

- Joint venture with Mahyco 50:50 for marketing of biotech cotton seeds and 74:26 for marketing of seeds. Both these joint ventures are by parent company and not MIL.
- Parent Company is 51 per cent investment in Joint Venture with EID Parry (**Hybrid rice seed business**).
- R & D centre of Bangalore also belongs to parent Company.

http://myiris.com/shares/company/reportShow.php?url=AMServer%2F2001%2F09%2FMONCHEIA_20010925.htm

In effect, Mahyco is the front.

As early as 1999, the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE) challenged the permission given by the Government to M/s Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company Limited [Mahyco, Monsanto's JV partners] in the Supreme Court, vide their Writ Petition No. 71 of 1999 for carrying out multi-centric trials (these are limited field trials) at 15 locations in 7 states without framing proper guidelines, rules and systems for evaluating the bio-safety and ecological and environmental impacts of genetically modified organisms used in crops. [Ibid]

Thus, it is on record that right from the earliest MLTs for Bt cotton, "*improper and illegal procedures*" were followed by the GEAC/DBT and that contamination from these limited field trials (MLTs), were a major source of concern. These observations by RFSTE are part of the record of the Rejoinder Affidavit.

The Indian taxpayer is now paying Monsanto's debt. The people of India will continue to pay

Monsanto with their lives and property.

The repercussions of the Regulator's releases of GM foods in India will be global.

World's best known scientists have sent their submissions

What is most heartening is that leading scientists from all over the world have joined hands with Indian activists with their expertise and experience. Many have filed exclusive submissions to the Supreme Court.

"Dr. Arpad Pusztai, the world renowned toxicologist and leading expert in protein lectins in a telephone conversation with Petitioner No 1 said that in all these years of scrutinising industry studies, (and most of these have passed through his hands), he has never seen anything quite like this. According to David Schubert, the safety testing data on the Ministry (GEAC) website is "very poorly done and in the absence of REAL DATA it is impossible to make any assessment of the validity of their claims". Dr. Doug Gurian Sherman, Senior Scientist at the Centre For Food Safety concurs. Dr. Robert Mann formerly senior lecturer in biochemistry at the University of Auckland and Advisor to successive Ministry's of Health in NZ, says, "I regard the 'Bt'-brinjal field-trial proposal as one of the most ill-conceived I have encountered in my three decades of critical appraisal of GM. The risks and hazards, while not exactly known or indeed precisely foreseeable, appear to be so grave that the proposed field-trials should be enjoined pending a thorough assessment such as has yet to be performed." Dr. Mae Wan Ho (of the Independent Science Panel) and Prof. Joe Cummins, Prof. Emeritus of Genetics, University of Western Ontario, Canada, say: "In India, brinjal would be comparable to potato or tomato in the American diet. GM Egg Plant Contains Bt Toxin Linked to Hundreds of Allergy Cases and Thousands of Sheep Deaths. It would be unthinkable and irresponsible to approve the genetically modified eggplant. Dr. Mae-Wan Ho and Prof. Joe Cummins find neither published studies nor experimental details on safety tests in the application for field releases of the Bt brinjal and raise serious questions. Instead of approving more GM crops, regulatory authorities in India should start a comprehensive enquiry into the health impacts of Bt cotton and impose a ban on further releases of all GM crops".

So, the buccaneers have pushed GM rice and GM veggies: staple food of Indians. They have stealthily planted GM seeds in plots right across India. It is a well known fact that GM seeds can easily contaminate non-GM seeds through cross pollination. GM contamination could be widespread because there is no way to prevent contamination across India's farming areas.

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How you can help India

In 2005-06, Indian rice exporters exported 5 million tonnes of rice valued at US\$1.53 billion to 102 countries worldwide. Their main markets are Europe, North America, West Asia, and Australia. **In each of these countries, the respective Governments must**

Warn The Indian Government that Consumers Do Not Want GM Indian Rice

We suggest: Start Testing

Next, if you are a consumer, petition your local representatives to send a strong letter to the Government of India to install internationally acceptable test protocols to check for contamination, at all ports and in all states and that pending such decision no primary foods be allowed in importing countries. Most importantly, ask your representative to tell the Government of India to

Stop all GM field trials because it will destroy the global environment

None of us wants to hurt Indian exporters and farmers; many poor farmers depend on steady market provided by the exporters. Every farmer's association has come out against GM seeds. The All India Rice Exporters Association has expressed its readiness to work with all persons who refuse to fall in line with a pro-GM agenda because of the demonstrated risks of GE technology. But we are also sure that when their market shrinks, these exporters and their supplier farmers will hang every politician and member of the Indian Parliament from the nearest tree.

The impact would be swift and decisive. There is no other option. Pass the news far and wide.

Undertaking required from the Indian Government

The Government of India must give an undertaking to the Indian rice consumers worldwide that

[a] it was dishonest in that it did not exercise due diligence and checks at ports, including bio safety assessment based on the precautionary principle;

[b] it has unconditionally banned all GM rice and GM food field trials;

[c] it shall make public the names of producers of GM seeds, ownership [including joint ventures in India], location, contact number, names of principal officers, and nationality of the companies, it has granted permission for trials and dates when permissions for trials were granted;

[d] it publicly acknowledges the harms caused to humans and environment if GM crops are planted and/or consumed based upon independent published studies, and

[e] It is prepared to compensate for health damages caused to consumers because of consumption of GM rice.

If possible bring in lawsuits against the Government of India for allowing shipment, if rice exports test positive for GM.

Bt (GM) rice has not been approved for human consumption and Bt foods including rice are

a proven health hazard.

All GM foods are weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, bring-in lawsuits against the Government of the USA, including the US-FDA and USDA, like the instance cited below:

The most recent incident of contamination has occurred with American Long Grain Rice. The announcement in August 2006 that an unapproved variety of genetically modified (GM) rice, i.e. not approved for human consumption, had been found at low levels in US long-grain rice shocked the global food industry. Bayer Crop Science's GM LL601RICE had last been grown in field trials in 2001 and was not intended for commercialization. Liberty Link 601 [LL601 rice] has been modified to be tolerant to Bayer's herbicide, Liberty (glufosinate), so farmers can use the weed-killer without harming the crop.

The global marketing of unapproved GM rice has led to product withdrawals in Switzerland, Germany, France, Sweden, Ireland and the UK. Exports to Europe require certification that foods are GM-contaminant free. Japan has zero tolerance for GM crops, has halted rice imports from the USA, and is carrying out extensive tests to detect LL601contamination level and extent.

It is obvious that there has been a cover-up. Most corporate crimes are committed with full knowledge of top management. Bayer knew about the contamination before it was discovered. So does Monsanto, despite its claims on its website that it operates through an Indian parent company.

Most of all, the Indian Regulator must carry the highest responsibility and stands heavily indicted. .

The US Regulators are implicated for concealing the contamination from Bayer's LL601 variety. Bayer is being sued by growers in Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Texas, who have filed lawsuits amounting to hundreds of millions of dollar for damaging farmers' sales through loss of markets. The contamination had gone undetected because no testing was done prior to this year.

The US Government is not only stealing genetic assets, it is deliberately promoting near lethal food worldwide. Genetic Engineering if not stopped will lead to the irreversible contamination of the world's food at the molecular level and in perpetuity. This demonstrates the seriousness of the crisis we face.

We need a million lawsuits worldwide

We need every lawyer, who is not part of the inner coterie of the murderous neo-cons in Washington and London and their minions elsewhere, to work on a standard draft in accordance with their respective national Environment Protection Laws, Food Laws, and restrictive provisions for GE experimentations, and file one million lawsuits worldwide against Monsanto, Bayer, and others who have tested and tried in open fields any genetically modified crops that is food for us. Lawyers also need food, healthy food!

Whilst a lawsuit claiming damage to health may warrant proof of evidence of "damage"

which will be difficult to obtain, therefore, appellants should seek damages for contamination from genetic engineering that is known to cause [a] damages to living cells, [b] damages the environment, and [c] damages biological diversity.

If you are a consumer, talk to lawyers in groups and file class action suits. There is enough evidence from a number of animal studies that genetically modified foods can make you infertile, retard your children's growth, cause unknown and untreatable diseases, destroy your life and terminate your life prematurely.

These murderers can beat us up, bribe the Indian Police to lock our farmers up, and file utterly baseless cases just to harass us. But none of these companies can fight a global opposition.

Your life and health is in your hands. Help us fight this global menace.

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Note: <http://www.gmwatch.org/archive2.asp?arcid=7205>

1. The above url documents what is going on in India and how the big bio-tech firms are misusing their financial and political clout to harass and physically intimidate farmers.
2. All documents quoted in this article are in the public domain or have been placed as evidence in a writ petition filed in the Supreme Court of India, No 206 of 2006. The case is still being heard. Detailed references and key documents can be sent to any person interested.
3. We are requesting as many editors/web site administrators to place an online petition. We need 100,000 signatures from all over the world before 14th December.

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