

January, 31<sup>st</sup> 2007



## •Fortnightly Bulletin on Genetic Engineering South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE)

---

### Contents in this edition

1. *Press Release*: by petitioners of Public Interest Litigation(PIL) on health hazards of GE foods
2. *Study*: explores the effect of genetically modified crops on developing countries
3. GM's watch vote for *best article of 2006*
4. *Press Release*: by Green Peace: *the global status of GE crops; 10 years of continuing rejection*
5. *Threat*: genetically engineered corn can do you more harm
6. *Concern*: decline of bees and other pollinators raises concern for food supply

---

### **PRESS RELEASE:**

---

*Delhi University's Impleadment application to the SC to field test Mustard DMH-11 compromises a critical biosafety protocol of the court, for three added reasons that it is confirmed to be a sterilisation technology based on pollen \*GURTS (Genetic Use Restriction Technology)\* The conflict of interest in the regulation of GM crops is deep and pervasive. **The Union of India is openly collaborating with the Government of the United States of America to commercialise GE crops in India: to subject Indians to the riskiest and fastest experiments anywhere with regard to GM foods and animal feed.***

#### **\*Genetic Use Restriction Technologies (GURTS)\***

is the "official" name for Terminator technology that is used at the United Nations and by scientists. It refers to a general category of technologies that, in their design, provide a mechanism to switch previously introduced genes on or off, using external inducers like chemicals or physical stimuli (e.g. heat shock). This mechanism allows for restricted use or performance of transgenes. There are two main

---

**\*logo courtesy- JIGMOD**

categories of GURTs, namely trait-related or T-GURTs and variety-related or V-GURTs. Whilst T-GURTs aims to control the use of traits such as insect resistance, stress tolerance or production of nutrients, V-GURT aims to control reproductive processes that will result in seed sterility, thus affecting the viability of the whole variety. (V-GURT is a concept, with many different potential designs.) The ability to switch the GURT mechanism on or off externally enables the producer to exercise control either over traits or the viability of seeds

www. [http://www.banterminator.org/glossary/genetic\\_use\\_restriction\\_technologies\\_gurts](http://www.banterminator.org/glossary/genetic_use_restriction_technologies_gurts)

In continuation of the PIL filed in July 2005 in the Supreme Court for a moratorium pending a comprehensive biosafety protocol, Petitioners have filed two submissions in

January 2007, which provide the following evidence:

### 1. Contamination from Field Trials Risk India's Bio-safety in Perpetuity

At this juncture, contamination is the critical issue precisely because of outstanding safety concerns that GMOs present; that the bio-safety risk through contamination by more than one method is confirmed, and transgenic or gene contamination is a biological certainty. Since this involves a time-scale of perpetuity, it is therefore unacceptable.

For this reason, it is necessary to apply the precautionary principle to this hazardous technology through an immediate moratorium on ALL FIELD TRIALS without which this Petition will be rendered infructuous. The hazards of GE are fully applicable to DU's Mustard DMH-11. Brassica (B) species including B juncea (Indian mustard) present particularly high contamination risks. DMH-11 is also engineered to be resistant to glufosinate, Bayer's herbicide. Glufosinate is toxic, carries environmental and health hazards and in Canada triple herbicide tolerance

including to glufosinate is a matter of serious concern. The extensive contamination of certified canola seed with transgenes for herbicide tolerance is staggering. The Canadian canola crop extends over some 5 million hectares, of which roughly 60% are planted with transgenic varieties. It now seems unlikely that transgene-free canola can be produced in western Canada.

The fact that DMH-11 is also a GURT greatly exacerbates the bio-safety risk. It therefore enjoins a more rigorous application of injunction applied to it and not by any means, less. The science is that the Barnase construct has "the potential to act as a GURT and is consistent in its effects with purposefully made GURTs, because the barnase plant and its POLLEN can restrict access to fertile plants" (Dr.JH). GURTs are rightly banned by COPs 8 (of the CBD) and that is also the intention of the Indian Protection of Plant Varieties and

Farmers' Act 2001 which bans the registration of any GURT.

DU places great emphasis on an integral proprietary technology in DMH-11 in which "any possible leaky expression of the barnase gene is completely avoided." This begs the question of whether the field trial is indeed purely a research exercise or is commercial testing. On the other hand, if the researchers had no commercial interest in the "proprietary technology", they could release the details and the results of safety tests for the larger scientific community to consider. Dr. Jack Heinemann states conclusively:

*"zero expression is impossible to prove and highly unlikely to be achieved. The researchers are making a powerful claim when they say 'any possible leaky expression of the barnase gene is completely avoided.' This claim is for an achievement that would not be a minor incremental advance on the science of gene expression, and therefore should*

*not simply be accepted without proper review of the evidence".* (Dr. JH, Director, Centre of Integrated Research and Biosafety, University of Canterbury)

"it does not seem entirely sane to

undertake safety tests involving known toxins in the open environment. Such tests on the safety of the ablation (to kill) toxins should have been undertaken on plants grown in a controlled glass house environment prior to being

released in the open environment for agronomic tests." (Prof. Joe Cummins, Professor Emeritus of Genetics, University of Western Ontario)

## 2. The G of India's Intent is to Promote & Commercialise GE.

The recent Indo-US Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture, (KIA) with Monsanto elected to a pivotal role, is the key in the joint political plan, involving the potent combination of the most powerful country in the world, the US with the largest democracy in the world, India, to push the commercialisation of GM crops in India, with global implications. By their own admission, (Union of India), the recruitment of our centres of education, i.e. universities and state agricultural universities (SAUs) is being rapidly deployed to aid the process.

Every US President since George H.W. Bush (1992) has made support of genetically engineered crops a matter of highest national priority. The control over the world's seed supply is the cornerstone of Monsanto's aim of supremacy over world agriculture, where "NATURAL SEEDS ARE VIRTUALLY EXTINCT". Transgenic contamination of the seed stock will preclude choice and is irreversible. If genetic engineering (GE) fails, then seeds will be our only recourse. Recovering the original genetic seed stock will however be impossible, which is the ultimate aim of biotech in order to gain control and domination over global crops.

In March 1998 the US Patent

Office granted Patent No. 5,723,765 to Delta & Pine Land for a patent titled, Control of Plant Gene Expression. The patent, which is Terminator, is owned jointly, according to Delta & Pine's Security & Exchange Commission 10K filing, 'by D&PL and the United States of America, as represented by the Secretary of Agriculture.'

The patent has global coverage. USDA's (United States Department of Agriculture) Phelps stated that the US Government's goal in fostering the widest possible development of Terminator technology was 'to increase the value of proprietary seed owned by US seed companies and to open up new markets in Second and Third World countries.'

D&PL is now in the process of being bought over by Monsanto. The acquisition will give Monsanto an unprecedented monopoly position as a seed supplier and the owner of the Terminator patent. Monsanto's tactics worldwide (including in India), and it also includes those of Bayer, Syngenta and the full biotech industry, should in the normal course be of the greatest concern to the Union of India and the national Regulator. Patents lapse over time; not so the biological control over a nation's food crops. The fact that biotech plans have not alerted a national bio-safety and food security

antennae, demonstrates a serious and dangerous break with the process of objective enquiry that may not be countenanced in a Regulator. It is proof of a mindset that is disastrous for India, must rank as the greatest betrayal of the nation's sovereign interests and is therefore reason for a corrective course of action to be applied with the greatest sense of urgency.. Monsanto's corporate interest of profit and domination over many decades, has taken priority over human concerns and therefore represents the corporate 'ethics' and culture of the company. Keeping company with other biotech majors like Bayer, it includes some of the worst human rights excesses committed by an organisation. In order to put a perspective on matters, i.e. the complexion of a government that finds it fit to support the likes of such as these, a telling description bears repetition:

On February 22, 2002, a court found Monsanto guilty on all six counts of negligence, wantonness and suppression of the truth, nuisance, trespass, and outrage. Outrage, according to Alabama law, usually requires conduct "so outrageous in character and extreme in degree as to go beyond all possible bounds of decency so as to be regarded as atrocious and utterly intolerable in civilized society."

The fact is: that India's GM and agricultural policy is being manipulated and steered by such a corporate entity and others like it, with the full backing of the US Government, to fulfil scary and anti-sovereign objectives of domination of global food supply with emphasis on the 3rd world. That the Indian Government should be aiding and abetting such a policy is dumbfounding. It defies rational sense and debate.

Two significant and further aspects of the conflict of interest within the Government and its Regulator, the GEAC, are: (a) The Co-chair of the GEAC, Charudatta Mayee, is simultaneously a Director of the ISAAA, an international network established to promote GM, funded by biotech majors like Monsanto, Bayer and Dupont; (b) Dr. Paintal the promoter of DU's mustard DMH-11 is also the chairman of the Review Committee set up by the GEAC for Bt Brinjal. He therefore oversees a body of regulation that he is himself subject to.

**Aruna Rodrigues with co-petitioners:  
PV Satheesh, Hyderabad;  
Devinder Sharma, New Delhi  
Rajeev Baruah, Mhow**

It is also a fact that the Indian Constitution is being subverted through trade-related politics and pressure brought on India at the WTO by the USA. The Indian Government is accordingly committed to embarking on a sleuth of measures to bend Indian regulations to allow both the commercialisation of crops and full scale GM imports without labelling into India. Bio-safety and the precautionary principle have been comprehensively ditched.

The solutions lie in (a) the election of independent members to the GEAC; (b) however, on its own, this measure will be insufficient to ensure the long term protection of India's national interest. It is therefore quite necessary to institute the office of an overseeing, autonomous and independent body, an OMBUDSMAN, which is instituted by an Act of Parliament to underpin its constitutional mandate of the protection of India's Biosafety. It has been suggested that a comprehensive working paper by civil society

must form part of the guidelines for this Body to ensure its independence and objectivity. It is recognized that the level of research, experience and expertise on GE that is available in the 'North' developed world is not matched in India. The presence therefore of world class independent scientists as advisors/consultants to the Ombudsman is also seen as part of a process that ensures a climate of world class excellence in the workings of such an institution.

Since it is civil society that is now bearing and will in future bear the brunt in perpetuity of the Regulators' reckless rush to commercialise this technology in India in partnership with the US Government and Monsanto, how we proceed is of the uttermost national importance. It therefore requires the most serious application of wills and hearts of National Government and

civil society to ensure that India gets it right, NOW, for we will not get a second chance

---

## **Study explores the effect of genetically modified crops on developing countries**

---

**A** new study in the February issue of *Current Anthropology* explores how the arrival of genetically modified crops affects farmers in developing countries. Glenn Davis Stone (Washington University) studied the Warangal

District of Andhra Pradesh in India, a key cotton growing area notorious for suicides by cotton farmers. In 2003 to 2005, market share of "Bt cotton" seeds rose from 12 percent to 62 percent in Warangal. Bt cotton is genetically modified to produce its own

insecticide and has been claimed by its manufacturer as the fastest-adopted agricultural technology in history.

Monsanto, the firm behind Bt cotton, has interpreted the rapid spread of the modified strain as

the result of farmer experimentation and management skill – similar to mechanisms that scholars cite to explain the spread of hybrid corn across American farms. But Stone's multiyear ethnography of Warangal cotton farmers shows an unexpected pattern of localized cotton seed fads in the district. He argues that, rather than a case of careful assessment and adoption, Warangal is plagued by a severe breakdown of the "skilling" process by which farmers normally hone their management practices.

"Warangal cotton farming offers a case study in 'agricultural deskilling'," writes Stone. The seed fads had virtually no environmental basis, and farmers generally lacked recognition of what was actually being planted, a striking contrast to highly strategic seed selection processes in areas where technological change is learned and gradual. Interviews also provided consistent evidence that Warangal cotton farmers prefer trying new seeds – seeds without

any background information whatsoever – to trying several strains on smaller, experimental scales and choosing one for long-term adoption.

The problem preceded Bt cotton, Stone points out; its root causes are reliance on hybrid seed, which must be repurchased every year, and a chaotic seed market in which products come and go at a furious pace and farmers often cannot tell what they are using. Farmer desire for novelty exacerbates the turnover of seeds in the market, Stone argues, and seed firms will frequently take seeds that have fallen out of favor, rename them, and resell with new marketing campaigns. For instance, one recent favorite seed in several villages is identical to four other seeds on the market.

Stone argues that the previously undocumented pattern of fads, in which each village lurches from seed to seed, reflects a breakdown of the process of "environmental learning," leaving farmers to rely purely on "social learning." Bt cotton was not the

cause of this "deskilling," but in Warangal it has exacerbated the problem.

"On the surface, [Warangal] appears to be a dramatic case of successful adoption of an innovation," Stone explains. "However, a closer analysis of the dynamics of adoption shows that the pattern some see as an environmentally based change in agricultural practice actually continues the established pattern of socially driven fads arising in the virtual absence of environmental learning."

Strangely, in another part of India, a very different history of Bt cotton has led to an improvement in agricultural skilling. In Gujarat, the loss of corporate control over the Bt technology has led to an increased involvement of farmers in local breeding, and an apparent increase in knowledge-based innovation.

[http://www.eurekalert.org/pub\\_releases/2007-01/uocp-set012507.php](http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2007-01/uocp-set012507.php)

---

## GM's watch vote for the best article of 2006

*P.Sainath comprehensively busts the myth of 'Bumper Crop' in Maharashtra*

---

**B**UMPER CROP? Where are you living?" Mohan Maratrao Patil wants to know. "My family has 45 acres here in Yavatmal — and all we've managed is 80 quintals of cotton so far. At best, we'll get another 80. We've lost lakhs of rupees." That his lands are irrigated has not helped. "Find me the farmer who has had that great harvest." Mr. Patil, a Bt cotton grower in Vanjiri, scoffs at the notion of a bumper crop.

The idea was aired by the Government of Maharashtra itself. The State's Minister of Marketing, Harshvardhan Patil, told the press more than once that he expected a huge rise in cotton production this year. Some reports had him predict a 'bumper crop' of 350 lakh quintals. Others had him peg it at a more modest 300 quintals. Either way, this would mean a huge increase of 30-40 per cent

over the official estimate for last year.

On the ground, in any of the six 'crisis' districts of Vidharbha, this 'bumper crop' is hard to spot. Farmers report huge losses. Official reports tend to confirm their claims. "The State would be lucky to see a yield of 160 lakh quintals this year," says Vijay Jawandia in Wardha. A leading farm activist of this region, Mr.

Jawandia believes "the only purpose this kind of bumper crop propaganda serves is to depress already low prices."

"It's the oldest story," says Mr. Patil. "When the crop is in the farmers' hands, all sorts of things are said and done to depress the price. Once it is with the traders, you will see the price improve." The implications are grave for most of the region's 1.7 million farm families. Close to half a million of them — more than two million people — have been recorded by a government survey as facing "maximum distress."

The Minister appears to have based his claim on the estimates of the Cotton Advisory Committee. That body felt Maharashtra would see a yield of 70 lakh bales this year. (That is about 350 lakh quintals.) The Agriculture Department may not contest that claim in public. But top officials say the yield won't exceed 40 lakh bales (200 lakh quintals). The gap between the two claims is a massive 150 lakh quintals. Which, Mr. Jawandia points out, "could be the final production figure *in toto*."

Also, as a senior official in Amravati told *The Hindu* : "Almost 3.5 lakh hectares were severely hit by floods and excessive rainfall in this division. Both cotton and soybean have been hurt." There were other problems, too. "Everybody was down with chikungunya," say farmers across the region. "It was very tough to get labour when we needed them most." With some farmers having switched to soybean this season, it gets even harder to see where the 'bumper crop' can come from.

"One aim, of course, is to depress prices," says Kishore Tiwari of the Vidharbha Jan Andolan Samiti (VJAS). "You will find mill owners associations and the like always predicting a bumper crop. They do not have the machinery or means to make such estimates, but they will. It pushes the price down. Yet, this bumper crop campaign has another purpose. It aims to boost the image of Bt cotton, which has fared badly. The idea is to say, even on less acreage, there's much more yield — thanks to Bt."

Many share his mistrust. This is one State where the Government has gone out of its way to promote Bt cotton. Even though some top officers have expressed grave doubts over this path. This is not new. Last year, the State's Agriculture Commissioner gave the Government of India a report that said "no significant differences were observed" between Bt and non-Bt varieties of cotton. Except, of course in terms of the price of Bt cotton seed — which the report found was not "a justifiable cost." Some basic myths were undermined. "On an average 3 to 5 sprayings were given to both Bt and non-Bt. The attack of sucking pest was reported on both." It also said its field officers found Bt cotton's performance "not satisfactory." And that in some cases, "non-Bt varieties yield better than Bt varieties." Despite this, Ministers, MLAs, and film stars were roped in to promote Bt cotton.

This year, the latest overview of the "Farmers' suicides in Maharashtra" from the office of the Divisional Commissioner, Amravati, begins more tactfully. It

says results from Bt cotton "have been mixed." It then goes on to spill the beans. "In rain-fed conditions, Bt cotton has not paid good returns." Which implies a disaster, since nearly 97 per cent of cotton grown in the State is unirrigated. "Though the use of Bt cotton in Maharashtra is increasing," says the overview, "the yields have been unstable. When farmers invest heavily in purchasing seeds and other inputs, the net return has often been negative."

Mr. Patil and his neighbour agree. "What do I do?" asks Laxmibai Bodewar. "First, we've taken a blow, getting much less than our 35 acres should have given us. Now we are unable to sell what we have. The price has collapsed. And there is no procurement." She talks to us sitting on a giant bed of cotton. Part of the 100 quintals she's stuck with at home. Ms. Bodewar, too, is a Bt cotton grower.

For a State sitting on a 'bumper crop,' the action has been slow. Never mind a yield of 350 lakh quintals of cotton. Official procurement has not even touched one lakh quintals as yet. "The delay is deliberate," says Mr. Tiwari of the VJAS. "This is forcing farmers to sell what little they have to private traders. To deflect criticism, they will step up procurement just before the start of the Assembly session on December 4. By that time, many will have sold in distress. Then they will say — farmers are getting a much better price on the open market. So let us wind this up altogether. That is the game."

<http://www.thehindu.com/2006/11/25/stories/2006112502891100.htm>

---

## **Press Release by Green Peace.**

### ***The Global Status of Genetically Engineered (GE) Crops; 10 years of continuing rejection***

---

**A**msterdam, Netherlands — **A summary of ‘Global reaction against genetic engineering in 2006’, released by Greenpeace today, provides solid evidence that resistance to genetically engineered crops continues to grow, amongst farmers, consumers and governments.** The Greenpeace summary was released just hours before the expected release of an annual report by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA), a think-tank supported by the agrochemical industry.

“There is irrefutable evidence that governments, farmers and consumers throughout the world recognise that GE is unreliable, unviable or downright dangerous,” said Jeremy Tager, campaigner for Greenpeace International, “Market reaction to the recent rice contamination scandal was of near epidemic proportions; some countries are banning GE altogether. Romania, for instance, which had 85,000 hectares planted with GE soy in 2005, will drop to zero this year, in keeping with the new government policy banning the cultivation of GE soy.”

The most significant demonstration of GE rejection was the rapid, widespread aftermath of Bayer’s LLRICE601 contamination scandal. In August 2006, the US government announced that significant amounts of US long grain rice were found to be contaminated with an unapproved genetically engineered variety, LLRICE601; the news elicited strong reactions from rice farmers and processors, as well as governments worldwide:

- The Rice Producers of California and a major rice mill in the state, Sunwest Foods, have called for a prohibition on any cultivation of GE rice (including field trials) in California.
- Large sectors of the rice industry, including Ebro Puleva, the world’s largest rice processor, committed to being GE-free.
- Rice traders of two of the largest rice exporting countries, Thailand and Vietnam, have signed an agreement that commits them to being GE-free, capitalizing on new market opportunities that have opened up as a result of the contamination of US rice supplies with Bayer’s GE rice.
- The Chinese Biosafety Committee once again requested further data and assessment on the safety of GE rice, thereby again delaying a decision about commercial approval, even though the varieties have been under active consideration by the committee for over two years.
- The All India Rice Exporters’ Association formally requested that the Indian government prohibit field trials of GE rice in basmati rice-growing states. Rice farmers in India burnt down GE-rice test plots that could potentially contaminate their own fields.

Rakesh Tikait, national spokesperson for the Bharathiya Kisan Union, (BKU) one of the largest farmers’ groups in India, was straightforward in his condemnation of GE, saying, “The threat to farmers’ livelihoods in India is clear. Examples of Bt cotton failures from across the country show that this technology is unsafe for humans and the environment, and that it can neither be controlled nor regulated. We consider the threat serious enough to warrant the destruction of test fields of GE rice to stop its introduction and protect ourselves.”

Chip Struckmeyer, a rice farmer from California, agreed, "US rice producers took a big hit financially when rice was found to be contaminated with unapproved varieties. It's clear our customers don't want genetically engineered rice. Why on earth would we plant it?"

"ISAAA might claim that genetic engineering has been a success, with consistent increases in global acreage. But the global reaction to the Bayer rice contamination scandal of 2006 provides a sharp contrast to the rosy picture they're painting. It is overwhelmingly clear that the GE industry will not be able to convince consumers to eat GE rice, wheat, aubergine, or anything else. With governments unwilling to allow it, farmers unwilling to grow it and consumers unwilling to buy it, it is amply clear that genetic engineering has no place in our future," concluded Tager.

<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/releases/10-years-of-continuing-reject#>

---

## The 2006 You Didn't Hear About

*Testimonies that speak volumes of how the grim superpowers of militaries and corporations can be resisted, and that the power of small activist groups, of workers, of citizens, of indigenous tribes, of people of conscience matters.*

---

The big news is usually the bad news, and this year the biggest stories weren't even news -- climate change and the war in Iraq were trouble that had begun well before 2006. But dozens of small stories set another tone -- the tone of that graffiti in Seattle during the shutdown of the World Trade Organization there in 1999: "We are winning" -- not the same as "we have won" and can stop; "we are winning" is a call to action. Activists won dozens of small and not-so-small victories for human rights and the environment in 2006. The fabric of the world is woven out of small gestures; the large ones mostly just rend it and leave more to mend. And the small gestures continue. Here are some of them.

On December 31, 2005, Black Mesa Coal shut down its mine on indigenous land in Arizona because that mine fed all its coal -- as water-depleting slurry pumped 300 miles across the desert -- to the Mojave Power Station that cranked out obscene quantities of particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, and all manner of other nasty things during the

decades of its operation. The mainstream media played it as a jobs story; the alternative media mostly missed what had a decade earlier been a big environmental cause.

In February indigenous leaders, forest activists and logging companies reached a historic deal that protected five million acres outright and limited logging on another 10 million acres of the Great Bear Wilderness in north-coast British Columbia. That's an area more than twice the size of Yellowstone National Park wholly preserved with another four or so Yellowstones protected -- and not just set aside as national parks are, but put under the joint jurisdiction of the First Nations people from the region and of the provincial government.

Indigenous peoples won victories all over the world in 2006, perhaps beginning with the inauguration of labor leader Evo Morales as president of Bolivia on January 22nd, the first indigenous president of the largely indigenous nation since the Spanish invasion almost five centuries before. He made good

on his campaign promises to nationalize energy resources and negotiated contracts giving the impoverished nation far higher percentages of profits from natural-gas extraction. In November, the Achuar people of the Peru-Ecuador rainforest blockaded a major oil producer and forced it and the Peruvian government to implement environmental reforms.

Similarly, on July 20th, the Nigerian courts ordered Shell Corporation to pay \$1.5 billion to the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta, who had been fighting the oil company for compensation for environmental devastation since 2000. In December, in Botswana, the San people -- sometimes called the Bushmen -- won the court case over their eviction from their homeland. The decision restored their right to live, hunt, and travel on their ancestral lands.

While the Navajo still fight an attempt to site a new power plant on their reservation, there were other victories against the environmental destructiveness of energy production when

Congress banned all new oil, gas, and mineral drilling leases on the Rocky Mountain Front region of Montana, one portion of the west chewed up by the Bush-era extraction stampede.

There were domestic victories on other fronts. One major U.S. citizen achievement was the October defeat of attempts to privatize and jack up usage fees on the Internet, despite \$200 million in corporate spending on the issue. A new grassroots movement defeated the telecom industry's attempt to take over this major new zone of global communication for its own profit. A minor but sweet victory for independent thinking and bold opposition was Stephen Colbert's April dressing down of the Bush Administration, to the president's face, at the White House Press Corps dinner. The mainstream media, also excoriated by the bold Colbert, ignored the spectacular verbal attack until the alternative media made the story impossible to ignore. Such trajectories -- major stories investigated, exposed and explained by the alternative media until the mainstream can no longer ignore the news -- are one of the reasons why net neutrality matters.

Another grassroots groundswell that mattered was the immigrants' rights marches of last spring, which were launched with the surprising turnout in Los Angeles -- not the easiest city for walking and marching -- of more than a million Latinos and others defiant of crackdowns against immigrants. Similarly huge and passionate demonstrations, many organized by text messaging, Spanish-language radio, and other means, swept the nation. They demonstrated

that immigrants were not going to be so easy to bully; the force of their numbers and passion left Republican plans to repress and to demonize immigrants, undocumented and otherwise, in disarray. The marches were jubilant and powerful, one of those no-going-back moments when a group decides never to be a silent victim again. The culminating marches on May Day were the first time in many decades that the U.S. had adequately joined the rest of the world in commemorating this worker's holiday that commemorates the anniversary of the Chicago labor march and rally in 1886.

Mexicans rose up in 2006, and the country seems to be on the brink of revolution, if citizen discontent is any measure. The city of Oaxaca was seized by its citizens and for many months functioned as an autonomous zone akin to the Paris Commune of 1871, until violent repression in November. After the stolen presidential election in the summer, millions of Mexicans took up residence in the streets of the capital to protest the corruption and model an alternative -- the huge occupation of the central zocalo (or plaza) and surrounding area experimented with mass democracy meetings in the open air, while Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the Mexico-City mayor who probably actually won the election, set up a shadow government. The Zapatistas, a dozen years after their appearance on the world stage, continued to play a role in Mexican politics.

The Bush Administration continued its slide into ignominy as even the craven politicians

who had waved flags and followed orders during the long patriotic nightmare after 9/11 found it safe and useful to attack the administration. Many Republican candidates declined to appear with the president, and Cheney made his mark this year largely by shooting a major campaign contributor in the face while attempting to shoot birds just released from cages for the purpose -- perhaps an allegory for the voting public. Though some good candidates won election and Congress and the Senate went to the Democrats, the Democrats as a whole will at best endorse victories won elsewhere, which is why the grassroots matter so much.

It was a lousy year to be a Republican president, though not nearly as bad as being a U.S. soldier or an Iraqi citizen. A number of highly visible defections from the war in Iraq made a difference in 2006, notably that of Lieutenant Ehren Watada, a Japanese-American officer from Hawaii who refused to serve in what he called "an illegal and immoral war." Recruiting kids to serve in the military became harder than ever, and recruiters fought back with ever-lowering standards, ballooning bonuses and, according to many sources, packs of lies.

Five central Asian nations -- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan -- signed a treaty foreswearing nuclear weapons anywhere on their considerable territory in September, further upsetting the Bush Administration which hoped to reserve the option of siting a few nukes there. Donald Rumsfeld was obliged to resign after the 2006 elections,

and he may join Henry Kissinger as thugs who don't like to travel abroad -- the U.S.-based Center for Constitutional Rights filed a lawsuit against the former Secretary of Defense in Germany, on behalf of torture victims from Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. This picked up where the lawsuits against Chilean ex-dictator Augusto Pinochet -- hounded by justice the last eight years of his life, until his death earlier this month - left off.

It wasn't such a great year to be a free-trade advocate, either. The United States's most fervent advocate, Thomas Friedman, was outed by independent journalist Norman Solomon as a person so insanely rich -- through marriage into one of the wealthiest families in the country -- that his opinions are deeply contaminated by membership in the ultra-elite that prospers by policies that bankrupt the rest of us. The Free Trade Area of the Americas was already sabotaged by left-wing leaders in South America in 2005; in 2006, Ecuador canceled a contract with Occidental Petroleum, so annoying the Bush Administration that it broke off trade talks with the country. The World Trade Organization continued to falter -- some activists pronounced the once-fearsome organization dead this summer, when the long-floundering Doha round of negotiations fell apart.

Though binational trade agreements -- such as the U.S.-Peru agreement signed earlier this month -- continue to threaten local power, labor and the environment, the failure of the WTO to become the world's economic superpower is evidence of the power of

resistance. Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian revolution continued to evolve, most notably with the early December meeting at which South American leaders looked at forming an economic bloc along the lines of the European Union -- an alternative not just to corporate "free trade," but to the colonialism that has long drained the wealth of the region.

Wal-Mart too met with major setbacks, starting with an ever-increasing bad image around the world, thanks to activist exposes. Domestic sales slumped in the US by November; South Korean sales were so dismal that Wal-Mart sold its 16 stores to a Koran discount chain; the world's largest corporation also announced last July that it would pull out of Germany. In January, Maryland legislators overrode the corporation's pressure and their own Republican governor to force Wal-Mart to spend more on healthcare for workers in the state.

Halliburton was so besieged by citizen-opponents in Texas that it held its annual shareholder's meeting in Duncan, Oklahoma, and was even there surrounded by people chanting "shame!" Bechtel, driven to move its headquarters out of San Francisco by frequent protest, withdrew from Iraq in ignominy this year, its contracts canceled and its reputation sullied. The children's hospital in Basra that Bechtel was supposed to build and Laura Bush loudly championed as evidence of American virtue was put "on hold" in July far behind schedule and far over budget.

Late this year, even the European Union struck a blow against the reign of the

corporations when it adapted the Reach Regulation, a set of laws that essentially implements the precautionary principle: corporations will have to prove that their chemicals are safe, rather than requiring government agencies to prove they are dangerous. Austria banned Monsanto's genetically engineered canola and genetically modified corn; Romania banned genetically modified soy.

Meanwhile, in the United States, cities, regions, and states continue their withdrawal from the federal scheme of things. The Supreme Court is still out on whether the Environmental Protection Agency can and must, as Massachusetts argues, regulate greenhouse gases, but the September passage of the Global Warming Solutions Act in California is a landmark in states doing what the federals refuse to do: address the obscenely disproportionate American contribution to climate change.

And forest activists didn't just protect the Great Bear Wilderness in British Columbia. They won a huge Canada-based victory over Victoria's Secret, which this month caved in after a long campaign and agreed to use recycled and sustainable paper in its 350 million catalogues per year. The catalogues had been produced from paper made from trees logged in Canada's endangered boreal forests; the activist group ForestEthics led the campaign.

What all these victories add up to is a message that the grim superpowers of militaries and corporations can be resisted, and that the power of small activist groups, of workers, of citizens, of

indigenous tribes, of people of conscience matters. 2007 will be

a very interesting year.

<http://www.alternet.org/story/46015/>

---

## **Threat: Genetically engineered corn can do you harm**

---

**T**he corn chips that you munch on while watching your favourite TV show or movie might get you into trouble. For, it could well be contaminated and cause you serious health problems in the long run.

Greenpeace International, a non-profit organisation working in over 40 countries against environmental degradation, has said that corn-based products imported from the US are "genetically engineered" (GE) and are harmful to human health.

Greenpeace officials say many of these products, including some popular American brands of chips, some varieties of cornflake, cornmeal, cornfix, and cornflour etc. are "risky" for consumption as they are manufactured from GE maize.

The US, say Greenpeace officials, is the largest producer of GE crops in the world.

"In December last year we collected 35 corn-based products currently sold in supermarkets in Dubai, Qatar and Kuwait. When product testing was carried out by an accredited laboratory in Switzerland, 40 per cent of the samples tested positive for contamination, with genetically

modified organisms," said Andi Fremueller, Project Coordinator of Greenpeace.

Explained Arnaud Apoteker, another senior official of Greenpeace: "Genetic engineering allows scientists to insert genes from one species into another in a way that cannot occur naturally.

The most common genetically engineered trait in plants is engineering plants which do not die when sprayed with agricultural pesticides or poisons. It's the so-called herbicide resistance. These plants develop a pesticide of their own inside their cells for protection. These GE organisms can interbreed with natural organisms, thereby contaminating non-GE environments and future generations in an unforeseeable and uncontrollable way."

And what can this contamination do? Greenpeace officials say it can lead to many ailments. "A long term test has never been done in this connection. But it can lead to allergies and damage of the alimentary canal," they pointed out.

Greenpeace had earlier found contaminated rice products in the Gulf countries. They were

contaminated with unauthorised GE rice variety. These products, too, were imported from the US. Following this, some supermarkets had decided to take these rice products off their shelves and asked for an explanation from the importing company. Apparently, they have not received any explanations yet.

Talking about the solution to the problem, Greenpeace officials say the government should start the system of labelling of products. "There is no legislative control in here to regulate the GE food. However, Saudi Arabia is strict on this. Labelling is a must here. We have talked twice to the food safety department and they are aware of the situation. In fact, the supermarkets can very well take the initiative and ask for a guideline from the government," said Freimueller.

Officials of the Dubai Municipality refused to comment on the issue. According to sources, they are aware of the matter. "GE food is very popular in the US.

Regular intake can lead to a lot of problems. Moreover, the GE corn is a cheaper," said an official.

[http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2007/January/theuae\\_January868.xml&secti on=theuae&col=](http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticleNew.asp?xfile=data/theuae/2007/January/theuae_January868.xml&secti on=theuae&col=)

---

## **Concern: Decline of bees and other pollinators raises concern for food supply**

---

**T**he decline of bee populations in Europe and North America has raised alarm about pollinators that fertilize crops essential for the human food supply.

Experts are calling for measures to protect pollinators of all kinds, including not only bees, both managed and wild, but birds, bats, flies and even beetles.

They say people should become much more tolerant of plant species that are currently viewed as weeds which can be vital to pollinators' survival.

**"Pollinator declines and pollination deficits are now being reported for North America and may signal a threat to ecosystem and agricultural productivity," says a paper by University of Guelph ecologist Vernon Thomas.**

The paper was presented this week in Ottawa at the first Canadian meeting of the North American Pollinator Protection Campaign.

A report by the U.S. National Academy of Science last year said long-term population trends for several wild bee species, notably bumble bees, some butterflies, bats and hummingbirds are "demonstrably downward."

But there is virtually no population data on many pollinating insects, the report says.

Protecting pollinators requires a continent-wide approach because they don't respect national borders, said Charles Caccia, senior fellow at the Ottawa University Institute of the Environment.

Caccia has been instrumental in launching the Canadian Pollinator Protection Initiative, modelled on a similar U.S. campaign.

Threats to pollinators include pesticides, climate change, habitat destruction, invasive species and human indifference.

Farmers and others should be less zealous about eliminating weeds around the boundaries of farmland, in ditches or utility rights of way, experts say.

"It's actually these kind of scruffy areas that pollinators like," said Laurie Davies Adams, executive director of the Washington-based CoEvolution Institute.

Government regulations that discourage the growth of certain types of plants, such milkweed, can also be a problem.

Gardners can play a useful role by creating habitat for pollinators, Adams said.

"What we want is for everyday people to look at their gardens and say, do you want just a static stage that is an empty theatre or do you want actors to come in and have this interaction?"

Faisal Moola, a biologist with the David Suzuki Foundation, stressed the importance of protecting a wide variety of plants.

"Very few pollinators are specialists; most are generalists. Consequently they depend on a full range and diversity of plants.

"Keep in mind that many flowers have particular blooming periods. You need to have an availability of floral resources right through the lifespan of that insect."

[http://www.mytelus.com/news/article.do?pageID=agriculture\\_home&articleID=2520087](http://www.mytelus.com/news/article.do?pageID=agriculture_home&articleID=2520087)

*SAGE requests you to kindly send us news and issues around the State and threats weaved around genetic engineering. We shall share it with our partners. Also kindly send us the contact details of individuals and organizations to which we can send the bulletin.*

*This fortnightly bulletin is brought out by South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE), a coalition of civil society activists, farmers, scientists, academicians, and consumer groups of four Southern States of India, viz., Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. SAGE has been waging a concerted battle against genetic engineering through a series of activities that involve public protests, media actions, seminars, consultations and publication of a series of education.*