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Meeting rejects Biotechnology Bill

Special Correspondent

'Genetic engineering can cause irreversible impact on agriculture'

HYDERABAD: A round table on legal dimensions of genetic engineering in food and farming in the country, has demanded withdrawal of the proposed Biotechnology Regulatory Authority Bill and other legislations that facilitate easy entry of genetic engineering (GE) technology.

A declaration released on Thursday after the two-day meeting organised by the National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR) University of Law and South Against Genetic Engineering (SAGE) emphasised that all these legislations were designed more to promote genetic engineering than regulate it. These should be rejected on the grounds of the irreversible impact that genetic engineering would have on India's agriculture and livestock systems.

The meeting was attended by farmers, lawyers, law teachers and students, women's groups and civil society representatives.

At a media conference here, P.V. Satheesh, convenor of SAGE and M. Sridhar of NALSAR University, said any law proposed on GE should be towards protecting India's food producers and consumers. The conservation of biodiversity should be the focus with measures ensuring bio-safety as important mechanism.

In addition, any such law relating to seeds and GE should also incorporate clauses for ascertaining strict liability towards any harm caused to farmers who practise such ecological processes. Such liability clause should cover seed companies, whether GE or not, pesticide and fertilizer manufacturers including State governments and affiliated agencies. Till such time as clauses are brought about, no further field trials should be allowed by Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC).

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