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India must cultivate crops, not import: E

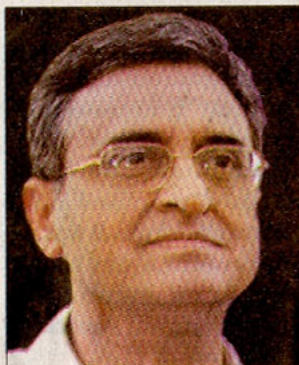
Experts feel that it would be impossible to feed 1.3 billion people farming methods, a reality which even the government ackno

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Despite ideologically opposing the domestic cultivation of genetically modified (GM) mustard seeds, India continues to import a large quantity of genetically engineered mustard oil. In fact, edible oil has become India's third largest import item after crude oil and gold. This baffles many. In FY15, India imported edible oil worth Rs 70,000 crore, of which 30% was GM mustard oil. When the country is indeed importing and consuming mustard oil extracted from GM mustard seeds then "the political opposition to

the domestic cultivation of transgenic crops lacks conviction," says Dr Deepak Pentel, the man behind the successful development of an indigenous variety of GM mustard seed which can substantially increase India's domestic production of mustard oil and reduce our increasing reliance on food imports. The scientific community feels that it would be impossible to feed 1.3 billion people simply by traditional (organic) farming methods, a reality which even the government acknowledges by importing genetically modified soya and mustard oil.

The current government seems sympathetic to the issue, feels Dr Pentel. He



Dr Deepak Pentel

is happy to see the regular meetings of genetic engineering appraisal committee being conducted under the current dispensation. He is also happy that the Department of Biotechnology and the Ministry of Science and Technology is doing a thor-

ough job now on biosafety appraisals. "Both these steps give me hope that the government would take the bold decision to allow the cultivation of transgenic seeds in India as we successfully did during the green revolution," said Pentel.

"Without GM technology Indian agriculture is going to collapse," says Chengal Reddy, chief advisor to the Consortium of Indian Farmers Associations. He accuses some NGOs who, in connivance with India's import lobbies, are deliberately sabotaging the domestic cultivation of India's own developed GM mustard seeds. He fears that the government's complacency would take our ed-

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