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This nutritional pathologist for over 30 years, joined NIN in 1977 and served as the director of the institute since 2006. Dr Sesikeran shares his views on the state of affairs in GEAC.

Excerpts from an interview:

Q. What is happening within GEAC as of date?

Dr B Sesikeran: The GEAC has not met for a year now. The last time its members came together was in March 2013. There have been no meetings thereafter. I do not know the reasons behind it. The GEAC is currently not offering any approvals for Genetically Modified (GM) crops.

Q. Is there a lot of misinformation about GM crops?

Scientifically it is proven beyond any doubt that GM crops are safe for consumption. Unfortunately, people have concocted unscientifically proven stories about GM foods.

Activism has taken advantage of these claims and have over taken the scientific community.

Even countries like Bangladesh, which are much more backward compared to India, have taken the initiative of approving GM crops, as they found it immensely useful for their farmers.

Thanks to the Honorable Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Hopefully, our farmers in India might see the benefits and adopt the same.

Q. How can we change the current perception about GM crops?

Education on GM crops should have started long before commencing its research. If it had, people today would have had more awareness about GM crops.

However, this was not done. People here wanted to first carry out the research rather than focus on spreading the awareness.

In the meanwhile, many MNCs, who had the technology, started to collaborate with institutions, leading to the creation of local hybrids.

Europe had been at the forefront of activism in opposing GM crops. Today, we are following the same footsteps. In the last 20 years, the data that we have accumulated evidently shows that GM crops are safe and many researchers have carried out robust studies proving GM crops' safety.

Now, it is up to the Ministry of Agriculture and DBT to together educate all stakeholders in this regard.

But this can be successful only if there is a political will and even the government will not be able to do anything until our ministers do something about it. I am hopeful that things will soon change.

Q. What do you have to say about the hold on GM field trials?

There has been huge investments in the GM crops' R&D. Some crops become successful while others don't. So this is purely a trial-and-error concept.

Open field trials is the actual test to check how the crops perform well and how they grow in different regions of the country and in different climatic zones and seasons. This is the only way to ensure success and usefulness of crops.

If GM crops are not going to be permitted to be grown, then the scientific information on the GM crops is not going to be available in our country.

Many expert groups tell researchers to generate more data. Regulations have to be made more robust. But regulations will require field trials which would generate valid scientific data.

If this is not done, it is as good as putting an end to GM crops. The government has invested millions in terms of GM research and putting a stop now on GM crop trials doesn't make sense.

Q. How can GM crops address the issue of food security?

When there is a crop failure during excessive drought or flooding, and we do not find alternatives, then we will have to import food from other countries. This should never happen.

Today, the climate varies and we do not know what might happen next month or next year. There is uncertainty about when it might rain or about the availability of sunshine.

We can use this technology to grow more food. This is our alternative to agriculture that we must have in our country to face dire situations. If there is a short-fall of food and we end up importing them, then we will lose our sovereignty as a country.

Q. How can our political system intervene in these circumstances?

The people in our political system should be open to innovative technologies and methods and not be carried away by fears and unnecessary issues. The government should trust scientists and technologies.

Off late, the government has lost its trust in scientists. The government listens to one activist but ignores 20 other scientists while making big decisions.

In such situations, trust is required which will allow us to go ahead with our research work, which will ultimately benefit the country.