

BRAI Bill a huge step forward

The Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) Bill, to be introduced in Parliament within the next few days, is a huge step forward for maintaining the integrity of environmental assessment process, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh said today.

"I believe that when the Bill will be introduced, it will address the concerns that have been expressed by the civil society groups that it will open floodgates for all GM foods. Nothing like it.

"It's just exaggerated notion of non-reading of the Bill. Once it is presented in Parliament, we all will see that the integrity of environmental assessment process has been maintained," Ramesh said at a function here organised by Association of Biotechnology Led Enterprises-Agricultural Group.

The Bill seeks to create a new body to regulate research, manufacture, import and use of products of modern biotechnology. The need for a biotech regulator was highlighted during the recent controversy over introduction of genetically modified brinjal for commercial cultivation.

Ramesh said for the last few months his ministry and Department of Biotechnology have worked very closely in order to draft the Bill and has kept all concerns in consideration.

Terming the Bill as a huge step forward, the Union Minister said that it was cleared by the cabinet a day before yesterday. "I expect the Bill will be introduced in the next couple of days in Parliament. It will then go to the Standing Committee and then will be open for public debate."

Ramesh also assured that the integrity of the public consultation process has also been maintained "as it is not only a technology issue but also a social issue which very often the scientists look down upon.

"But it is very important. Integrity of the social issues and public consultation has been maintained in the Bill."

He said that the regulator will be a professional, independent scientific body which will decide on the safety and efficacy of a bio-tech product.

"To deal with the issue of commercialisation we will have separate bodies, but the BRAI will deal comprehensively and credibly with the issues of safety," Ramesh said.

While refusing to further divulge on the Bill in view of ongoing Parliament session, he, however, maintained, "serious critics as well as the industry will also appreciate it."

He strongly felt that GM food should not be seen as the only route to all food security needs and stressed on public investments in the agriculture sector.

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