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Title : Govt on GM crops: Can't ignore science

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A day after allaying members' concerns in Parliament over genetically modified (GM) crops, the government on Wednesday dropped enough hints that it may eventually give its nod for 'confined' field trials of certain varieties of GM crops including rice, brinjal, chickpea, mustard and cotton.

"We are not saying no to science. Nobody can say no to science. We have to take proper caution. We have to take proper action. But you cannot deny, we are not living in the Galileo times," said environment minister Prakash Javadekar on sidelines of a function here.

His remark assumes significance in the light of consistent demand from the scientific community to allow them to go for field trials as it is the only way to find out the bio-safety details and other agronomic parameters of any genetically engineered crops.

Though the central biotech regulation – Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) – had given its approval for the

field trials of these varieties of transgenic crops last month, the matter has been pending before the environment ministry which has the mandate to give a final nod.

Sources said the government will take three issues -judicial, safeguards and processes (how to go about it) -into account before giving a case to case approval for field trials of GM crops.

Once ministry takes its call, seed companies and agricultural institutions will be able to go ahead with 'confined' field trials 'under strict safeguards' after taking 'no objection certificates' from the state governments concerned.

Field trial is an important step before commercial release of any crop. Bio-safety aspects of any transgenic variety of crops can be assessed properly only after field trials. India has, so far, released only transgenic variety (Bt) of cotton for commercial cultivation.

If government takes a call allowing field trials, it will certainly disappoint the RSS-linked associations which are vehemently against the GM crops.