

India on Auction

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The recent historic moratorium on Bt brinjal by Jairam Ramesh, minister of environment and forests, has created a network of citizens' organisations around the country that have risen spontaneously from the ground, and have prevented the country's agriculture becoming devoid of its diversity and moving in the direction of control by multinational corporations (MNCs). These corporations have strong links with the government of the United States of America, and their sole objectives are (a) to make as much money as possible by any means, and (b) to eventually have total control over Indian agriculture, using every ruse known to the world of conmen. Unlike the government of India, they are fully aware that whosoever controls seed and agrochemical business in India, controls its agriculture. And whosoever controls Indian agriculture, controls India and its food security, for 62 percent Indians derive their total sustenance from agriculture and, in the country, food security, food sovereignty, agriculture security, farmers security, and security of the rural sector, are synonymous and important components of national security and autonomy. If Bt brinjal had been approved, India would have, in course of time, ceased to be, *de facto*, an independent country and its citizens, would have had to start fighting the third war of independence.

It is unfortunate that government—politicians and bureaucrats (exception granted)—and the rich and the powerful in the country, seem to be siding with the MNCs (read US), in their attempt to acquire control over Indian agriculture. This is reminiscent of India being ruled by the British through a class of Indians. Only the structure, colour and strategy of this class seem to have changed, while Britain has been replaced by the US plus the MNCs.

India signed the India-US Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture during the first UPA government. Following this—and, perhaps, in preparation of this—research and extension work in agriculture seems to have totally discounted India's strengths and needs. The Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) has developed integrated pest management (IPM) and biopesticides for some 85 crops, including cotton and brinjal. Why have the persons in authority not used these technologies instead of peddling Monsanto's Bt crops?

Organic agriculture has been India's forte. It brings better price for the produce. Andhra Pradesh already has two million acres under organic agriculture and has plans to take this area to 10 million in the next two or three years. Why are India's Krishi Vigyan Kendras (Maybe there is one in each district) not encouraging organic agriculture? Why does not ICAR have an institute devoted to organic agriculture?

Given today's knowledge of molecular biology, why are agriculture research scientists in this hapless country not developing varieties which would have the advantages of hybrids? The farmers can then have their own seeds and would not have to depend on seed companies. At a meeting that the director general

of ICAR and this writer had co-chaired nine energy saving steps for agriculture were identified. Why have they not been taken?

The ICAR has published in several volumes, details of over 4000 traditional agriculture practices, many of which have been validated and cross-validated. There are many more documented by the National Innovation Foundation. Why is this government not using the validated ones and taking steps to examine the remaining? Why is this government not using horticulture potential? For example, all the technology exists in the State Forest Research Laboratory of Arunachal Pradesh to grow over 600 orchids through tissue culture. These orchids can capture the world orchid market, replacing Thailand (for Indian orchids are far more beautiful and the world is tired of Thai orchids) and bring to Arunachal Pradesh a revenue of over Rs 10,000 crore a year.

Why is the department of agriculture not using the outstanding capabilities that the National Remote Sensing Agency has to, for example, identify diseased plants in a field so that one can prevent the spread of the disease?

Ten of India's leading CEOs signed the Indo-US CEO agreement (available on Planning Commission's website) in which the Indian CEOs (led by Ratan Tata) agreed to put the lid on the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, promised not to give any trouble to Coca Cola and Pepsi irrespective of the quality and quantity of their misdeeds, and open the retail market to the US. There is already a US demand that India cuts down its subsidies to agriculture which are a pittance in comparison to what the US provides to its agriculturists.

Then India recently signed secretly, an MoU on 'Agriculture Cooperation and Food Security' with the US, even though all the inputs one requires—scientific, technological, managerial or social—to improve agriculture to meet national demands (present or future) are available within the country. The MoU (*The Hindu*, February 24, 2010), for all practical purposes, appears to have handed over India's food security and sovereignty, farmers security, agriculture security and security of the rural sector comprising 70 per cent of Indian population, to the US.

Also, the government has been supporting introduction of GM food and other crops in the country, which will eventually give control of India's agriculture to US-based MNCs. Jairam Ramesh, taking into account overwhelming public opinion and unbiased scientific opinion has, rightly and courageously, in a statesman-like manner, put an indefinite moratorium on the release of Bt brinjal; he has gone on record to say that he has only two supporters in the government and the ruling party: the prime minister and Sonia Gandhi.

India's surrender to the US seems to be total. If India buys nuclear reactors from the US (which the Manmohan Singhs would be obliged to buy), Indian government will pay most of the compensation in case of a nuclear accident, not the vendor of the reactor. And on the March 6, V K Saraswat, scientific

adviser to the defence minister, said that the US is still denying India technology (*Deccan Chronicle*, March 7, 2010).

On November 10, 1698, Charles Eyre bought three fishing villages—Sutanuti, Govindpore and Dihi-Kolkata—from a Bengali landlord for Rs1,300, and laid the foundation of today's Kolkata. Indians are now trying to sell the entire country for a pittance (if for anything at all) to MNCs and the US. Those who are involved in this effort must understand that the citizens of this country are well-equipped to fight the third war of independence if that happens. □□□