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Ram Gandhi institutes Award for 'Excellence in Public Life'

Ram Gandhi has instituted an Award under the aegis of the Rotary Club of Bombay to recognise "Excellence in Public Life" in memory of his father, the late PP Pravinchandra Gandhi.

President Pradeep Saxena, who announced this at the last meeting, said that Ram had made a corpus donation of Rs. 5 lakhs for the award.

Thanking him for his generosity, Pradeep led the members in applauding Ram for the award in memory of the doyen among bankers in India. Pravin helped nurture (and was for several years at the helm of) Dena Bank which almost became synonymous with his name. Ram has also set up a chair in memory of his father at Mumbai University. It was established at a function on June 16.



Mr. Adi Godrej and Jetu Lalvani

Additional donations from Adi Godrej and Jetu Lalvani

Honorary member Adi Godrej has made a donation of Rs. 3 lakhs to augment the corpus that he had established in order to finance the Rotary Club of Bombay PP Sohrab Godrej Award for Science and Technology.

With this, the corpus for the award has reached the figure of Rs. 5 lakhs as requested by the Board of Directors of the Club.

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Is science doomed to become the handmaiden of politics?

Are genetically-engineered crops a boon for farmers? Will they help farmers in a predominantly agricultural country like India to live a better life?

Or is genetically-modified (GM) food, far from being a panacea for farmers, just a ruse to keep them at the mercy of a handful of seed-manufacturing multinational corporations? Do such foods rob a country of its sovereignty?

These are questions to which there are no clear-cut answers as yet. However, there are many other issues that also need to be addressed.

For example, is the movement for GM foods a deep-rooted conspiracy by multinational corporations to corner the global market in seeds and to ruin the quality of soil all over the world? Is the campaign against GM foods an obsolete ideological posture liberally financed by manufacturers of insecticides and other sources?

Above everything else hangs a fundamental question – is the future of GM or genetically-engineered food products going to be decided by politicians? India's Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, has declared that "It is for the political system to decide whether to introduce BT brinjal or not".

So, is science doomed to become the handmaiden of politics?

Although all of the above (and more) questions were raised in the course of

the debate on "Genetically modified food and BT brinjal" at the last meeting, the answers were not concretised because of the paucity of time. When the proposition was put to the vote, the show of hands appeared to swing towards those in favour, but a call for a division went unheeded as the meeting had exceeded the time limit.

Under the circumstances, it would be best for readers to weigh the points made by the speakers and to arrive at their own conclusions.

However, there is no gainsaying the fact that the debate, which was ably moderated by Jagdish Malkani, Club Chairman for Global Warming/Green Vision, saw some outstanding presentations by two gentleman farmers and two representatives of non-government organisations (NGOs).

While one farmer, Mr. Ajay Jakhar from Haryana, spoke for the proposition, the other, Mr. Om Prakash Mor of Yavatmal, opposed it. Prof. C. Kameswara Rao, a consultant on biotechnology and medicinal plants, spoke on behalf of the NGO Foundation for Biotechnology Awareness and Education and supported the proposition.

Dilnavaz Variava, Chairperson for Rural Development and a feisty activist in her own right, spoke on behalf of the NGO Coalition for a GM-Free India (which could not send its representative from distant Kerala) and opposed the motion.

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R.I. President Kalyan Banerjee to address first meeting of new Rotary year

Rotary International President-Elect Kalyan Banerjee, who will assume office on July 1, will be the chief guest at the first meeting of the Rotary Club of Bombay for the Rotary year 2011-12.

The meeting, to be held at the usual venue, the Taj Mahal Hotel, on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 5, will be chaired by Paul George, who would have assumed office as President by that date.

Vijay Jalan, the incoming District Governor, will be the guest of honour.

The meeting will be followed by lunch to which all members are invited along with their spouses (there will be no luncheon charge for members and spouses).

Members are requested to attend the meeting of July 5, 2011, in large numbers to hear the inspiring address by Kalyan Banerjee, who will be the third Indian to serve as the President of Rotary International.

Forthcoming meetings

June 21, 2011

Mr. Alyque Padamsee, theatre personality and ad film maker, variously described as the "King of the Ad World" and "The Communications Guru of India", to speak on "The ideas explosion".

June 28, 2011

President Pradeep Saxena to present his annual report for the year and to give away the Club Awards for 2010-11.

The meeting will start at 1 pm sharp and conclude at 1.45 pm.

It will be followed by lunch to which all members are invited along with their spouses (there will be no lunch charges for members and spouses).



Today and tomorrow. President Pradeep Saxena was the only member from the Rotary Club of Bombay to attend the 2010-11 Rotary International Convention held in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, in May where he was snapped with incoming R.I. President Kalyan Banerjee and incoming R.I. First Lady Binota. (Please see Page 4 also)

Pic Courtesy: President Padmakar Nandekar, Rotary Club of Bombay Queen City

‘Thanks to BT cotton, peacocks and vultures are returning to Punjab and Haryana’

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The first speaker was Mr. Ajay Vir Jakhar, Chairman of the Bharat Krishak Samaj, a well-known farmers’ body in northern India, and a Director on NAFED. A second-generation farmer, he owned land in Punjab and came across as an affable, well-educated man (he is an Honours graduate).

He started by asking whether anyone could name the most destructive activity on earth. When no one answered, he revealed that it was agriculture.

“We kill everything that stops increase in (our) yield. Every insect that eats the crop is called a pest and we kill it; every grass that grows in our field we call a weed and we use a weedicide for it; for every fungus that grows we use a fungicide. We kill everything that grows. There is no practice in agriculture, including organic practice, which will not destroy the environment.”

Yet, agriculture was a sustainable activity and could be done with sustainable practices. But what was one trying to sustain? Was one trying to sustain the environment? If that were the case, then no one would use a plough in a field. No one would grow anything and man would just become a gatherer of food.

But was there enough for the human race to survive? It was not; therefore, man used every species on the planet to sustain the human race.

Once it was accepted that agriculture was destructive and that the human race was only trying to sustain itself, one had to conclude that every activity was a trade-off between benefits to the human race and losses to

other species. Whether one liked it or not, this was the hard fact of life.

While some people favoured organic products, others were for GM crops. But at the end of the day, despite the profusion of means and the confusion of aims, it was the survival of the human species that mattered and everything else was a consequence of that.

Mr. Jakhar said he had been growing BT cotton for nearly a decade and his experience was the same as that of the others (90% of all farmers growing cotton were growing BT cotton). In his experience, the use of pesticides had gone down and instead of 15 sprays per season (or once a week), farmers now sprayed insecticides only four to five times per season.

“As a consequence, our profitability has gone up; that’s why farmers are growing more BT cotton. Insects have come back to the fields, so have birds and bees. Peacocks and vultures, which had almost disappeared from Punjab and Haryana because of the excessive use of pesticides, have come back – and all this has happened because we are growing BT cotton. Thus, the environment has gained and so have the farmers.”

Mr. Jakhar said the idea behind the debate was wrong and that there was no point in pitting speakers propagating organic practices against those speaking for GM crops because the two were compatible; “you can do GM crops with organic practices”.

Regretting the attempt to see everything in black and white terms or as right or wrong, he said it was better to adopt the Buddhist middle path and to use tradition with scientific practices.

He asserted that there had been an increase of 140% in cotton production in the country over the last ten years. Thanks to this, both the farmers and the country had benefited.

As for those who said that cotton was not an edible commodity, he pointed out that no less than ten million tonnes of cottonseed oil had been produced and consumed in the country. It was now part of people’s diet.

Further, about 50% of the global area under soybean was GM soybean – 93% in the USA, 75% in Brazil and 100% in Argentina. Similarly, 31% of the global area under maize was GM; so also with canola – 88% in Australia and 94% in Canada was GM canola.

“The whole world is going GM. It’s like a sandstorm; you can’t stand in the middle of a sandstorm and say that you don’t like it. The sandstorm is going to blow you away. There’s nothing wrong with it (GM). And there’s safety in numbers. You can’t say that 5% of the people are right and 95% are wrong. We have been growing these crops for 20 years and people have been safe.”

Mr. Jakhar said that those travelling abroad invariably consumed GM foods because GM corn and soybean were now used in processed food throughout the world.

If technology and practices remained the same, then there would be a shortfall in food production of about 30% over the next 40 years. How would that be met? That’s why it was necessary to use every available technology in order to become self-sufficient.

Another reason for propagation of GM crops was the volatility in the

prices of petroleum products which, according to him, were the most important manmade input for agriculture. If the price of crude went up from \$100 to \$200, it would become impossible to plough the fields, to use urea and to increase yields

Mr. Jakhar insisted that food inflation was in single digits only because of the growing use of GM crops all over the world. These were helping farmers to maximise yields and to make optimum utilisation of nutrients.

In the future, if it became possible to develop GM strains of rice or wheat that would not need fertilizers, would the organic lobbies still object, he asked in conclusion.

The next speaker, also for the proposition, was Prof. C. Kameswara Rao. But on account of some difficulty with the audio-visual equipment, he resumed his seat and yielded space to the second gentleman farmer on the panel, Mr. Om Prakash Mor, who spoke against the proposition.

Mr. Mor said he hailed from Yavatmal and for several decades had used all kinds of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and so on before he was “converted” to organic farming; he had organised farmers to grow organic cotton and was acquainted with their experience with BT cotton.

“I was doing conventional farming using chemical fertilizers and was considered a model farmer. The State Agriculture Department brought officers and farmers to see my farm. However, I found that costs were rising, yields decreasing and farming becoming unprofitable.

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Two from the fields and two from the NGOs. The four participants in the debate on ‘Genetically modified food and BT brinjal’ at the last meeting are, from left, Mr. Ajay Jakhar, Mr. Om Prakash Mor, Prof. C. Kameswara Rao and Dilnavaz Variava

At the last meeting

(Held on June 14, 2011)

PRESIDENT Pradeep Saxena called the meeting to order and welcomed the guest speakers, the Visiting Rotarians, Rotaryans, guests and others.

BANNER RECEIVED

From the Rotary Club of Madrid through Shivkumar Israni.

BIRTHDAYS

Members and spouses celebrating their birthday during the week were felicitated.

ATTENDANCE

Members	113
Visiting Rotarians	3
Spouses/Rotaryans	4
Total	120
Svc. box collection	Rs. 4,750



Fellowship at the Club. Captured in this photograph at the last meeting are, from left, Pranay Vakil, Deepak Kapadia, Rajas Doshi, Rita Dalal, Vijay Jatia and Dilip Dalal

FINAL CLUB ASSEMBLY ON JUNE 22

The final Club Assembly for the Rotary year 2010-11 will be held at 6 pm on Wednesday, June 22 (and not June 15 as announced earlier), in the Babubhai Chinai Committee Room of the Indian Merchants' Chamber, Churchgate.

Hon. Secretary Bipin Kapadia has requested all Officers, Directors and Committee Chairpersons of the current and the ensuing Rotary years to make it a point to attend this important Club Assembly.

He has also appealed to all outgoing Chairpersons to send to the Rotary Secretariat immediately, detailed reports of all the activities conducted during the year gone by which ends on June 30.

This would help in the compilation of an overall report of the projects and programmes undertaken by the Rotary Club of Bombay during the year 2010-11.

New members have been especially requested to attend the forthcoming Club Assembly as it would give them an opportunity to see how the Club functioned.

Donor passes for fund-raising event 'Salsa Nite'

A few donor passes for the forthcoming "Salsa Nite", to be held from 7 pm onwards on Friday, June 24, in the Regal Room of the Trident (Oberoi), are still available with the Rotary Secretariat for a modest sum of Rs. 1,500 per person.

The "Salsa Nite" is being organised as part of the fund-raising drive to support the various Community Service projects of the Club.

Fund-Raising Committee Chairman Ashok Minawala appealed to members at the last meeting to buy the donor passes and to attend the forthcoming "Salsa Nite" to be held on Friday, June 24.

Pointing out that the event was being organised as part of the fund-raising drive, he said that the passes were available for a modest Rs. 1,500 per person and would go a long way in supporting the various Community Service projects of the Club.

The "Salsa Nite" would feature the auction of watches, jewellery, paintings and a few rare artefacts. The programme would be embellished with live music and dance that would help make the evening a memorable one.



Come Salsa

AN EXCITING EVENING OF LIVE MUSIC AND DANCE
AT THE REGAL ROOM-TRIDENT ON 24 JUNE 2011, 7PM ONWARDS

A FUND RAISING AUCTION
OF PAINTINGS, JEWELLERY AND WATCHES
From some of the best artists, designers and brands

DRESS CODE - COLOURFUL
ENTRY FOR ONE

NEW ORLEANS CONVENTION INSPIRES AND ENTERTAINS



President Pradeep attends R.I. Convention

President Pradeep Saxena was the only member from the Rotary Club of Bombay who attended the 2010-11 Rotary International Convention that was held in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, towards the end of May.

Back in Bombay and en route to Singapore, he gushed that the Convention was an "eye-opener" and that he had never before seen Rotary in such a splendid avatar.

The breadth and scope of Rotary activities was simply awesome, its membership was truly international and its Community projects had an edge that had Service written all over them.

The House of Friendship had a profound effect on him and he wished that the Rotary Club of Bombay had also highlighted its service activities within the available space.

Pradeep added that there was greater stress on Membership Development at the Convention this year, with the Office-Bearers noting that Rotary membership had remained static for some time. More attention was being paid to this aspect and the Rotaract movement was being monitored and nurtured in the hope that it would throw up many committed Rotarians in future.

As Rotarians said goodbye to New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, and another successful R.I. Convention, two leaders who have had a lasting impact on the organisation also said farewell.

Ed Futa, of the Rotary Club of East Honolulu, Hawaii, addressed his last Convention as General Secretary, a position he has held for 11 years.

"I will go back to my first Rotary job, which was and still is the most important job in all of Rotary: the job of being a Rotarian," said Futa who retires on June 30.

"I've had the honour and the satisfaction of being a part of so many of Rotary's accomplishments: Future Vision, our strategic plan, and our transformation from a valuable – but sometimes undervalued – Community Service organisation into a key player in the world of international health and development. PolioPlus has put us in this new position."

John Hewko, the incoming General Secretary, who will take office on July 1, also addressed the fourth plenary session.

Outgoing Rotary International President Ray Klinginsmith said the highlights of his term included providing regional assistance for Districts and Clubs through the new Rotary Coordinators and Rotary public image coordinators, developing a more productive relationship with Rotarian Action Groups, moving toward a more uniform size for Rotary Districts and improving the process for selecting and training District Governors.

"This year has been a good year for Rotary. There has never been a more exciting time to be Rotarians as we approach the end of polio. Our Community Service projects around the world are estimated to provide local investments of about \$1 billion every

year and our youth and young adult programmes are the best in the world. And our Rotary Foundation continues to gain strength."

More than 18,500 members of the family of Rotary, representing 151 countries and geographical areas, took part in the 2011 Convention where they were asked to redouble their efforts to eradicate polio and embrace humanity by thinking of new ways to take on today's challenges.

Convention highlights

R.I. President-Elect Kalyan Banerjee outlined his plans for the coming year and explained the three emphases – family, continuity, and change – that should guide Rotarians as they work to support the 2011-12 R.I. Theme, *Reach Within to Embrace Humanity*. Bill Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, told Rotarians that eradicating polio was his foundation's top priority. Rotarians must intensify their efforts to wipe the deadly disease off the earth, he said.

Kathie G. Short of the Rotary Club of Pass Christian, Mississippi, and Kathleen Koch, a former Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholar, revisited the devastation of Hurricane Katrina during a panel discussion.

Michael McQueen, founder of the Nexgen Group, said Generation Y has much to offer Rotary.

The family of Rotary put *Service Above Self* in New Orleans, working on projects to help rebuild areas ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. They helped build a house, finish and furnish a 1,400-square-foot library and reading room at the New Orleans Mission and painted homes.

Convention attendees were entertained by some of the city's best musicians, including Grammy Award-winning

trumpeter and bandleader Irvin Mayfield and trumpeter and singer Kermit Ruffins. They also saw performances by one of Klinginsmith's favourite artists, songwriter Michael Martin Murphy.

Before the Convention, about 350 Rotaractors voted on resolutions that will be considered by the R.I. Board during the first Rotaract Council, modelled after Rotary's Council on Legislation.

The Rotaract Club of Istanbul-Galatasaray, Turkey, was recognised as the Outstanding Rotaract Project international winner. The Club's "Integration Through Employment" project provided skills training for those with disabilities.

During the fourth World Water Summit, also held before the Convention, the Water and Sanitation Rotarian Action Group announced a partnership to bring 5 million gallons of clean water, along with sanitation and hygiene education, to 30 schools in Malawi and Tanzania.

Rotarians enjoyed the House of Friendship and Host Organisation Committee events during the week, including the Sounds of the South Concert and an evening at the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas.

Additional donations from Adi Godrej and Jetu Lalvani

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Announcing this at the last meeting, President Pradeep Saxena said that another additional donation, this one of Rs. 3.50 lakhs, had been received from Jetu Lalvani.

This sum would be added to the existing corpus that had been set up by him in order to fund the Rotary Club of Bombay Taru Lalvani Public Award for Protection of the Environment.

Pradeep informed members that in view of the escalation in the cost of silver and other materials, the Board of Directors in consultation with the Rotary and Public Awards Committee had decided to raise the corpus for the awards.

Those who had already instituted awards were being requested to raise the corpus for the same to Rs. 5 lakhs. Further, the Board had decided to request a donation of Rs. 10 lakhs for the institution of new awards.

Pradeep thanked both Mr. Godrej and Jetu who had been prompt in responding to the request and for being generous in making contributions.



The old order changes, yielding place to the new... From left to right in this composite picture are R.I. President Ray Klinginsmith who lays down office on June 30; the incoming man, Kalyan Banerjee, who becomes R.I. President on July 1; Ed Futa, Rotary's outgoing General Secretary, making his farewell remarks; and Ed Futa's successor, John Hewko, who will assume office as Rotary's General Secretary on July 1. These pictures were taken in the course of the 2011 R.I. Convention held in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, in May, 2011



Husain poses with his favourite brush before some of his famous works



The Master with one of his creations – his painting of the legendary M.S. Subbalaxmi, the one with the divine voice



M.F. Husain with one of his many admirers, Mrs. Parmeshwar Godrej, spouse of the Club's Honorary member, Mr. Adi Godrej



Yes, that's Girdharilal Vaid at right and standing at left is M.F. Husain. Between them is Aziz Javeri. They were shot many decades ago outside Jehangir Art Gallery

A six-decade-long association has come to an end



One titan greets another. M.F. Husain with former the President of India, Mr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

By Girdharilal Vaid
(A senior member of the Rotary Club of Bombay, the writer is a well-known collector of paintings and is featured as an art connoisseur in the book *Elite Collectors of India*)

I first met Husain Sahib at the entrance of Jehangir Art Gallery in the 1950s when the now-iconic gallery had just opened. When I introduced myself to him, he was humility personified and turned nostalgic as he remembered that his father had worked in our family concern, Indore Malwa Mills.

Thereafter, we met often and at several different places.

The last time I met M.F. Husain was at the home of Prafulla Dahanukar when we had dinner together. He was in his elements that evening and for hours narrated innumerable anecdotes, including his meeting with Picasso. We recited Urdu poetry and regaled ourselves to our hearts' content.

I also recall a very special exhibition of his works – within a church's precincts!

Driving down from Khandala, I headed straight for Afghan Church because it was the last day of his exhibition which had been arranged in the church premises. It was a spellbinding experience as his works were displayed in the church, with the ambience being multiplied manifold thanks to the magnificent stained glass windows of the church.

Even on that occasion, Husain Sahib and I sat together for an hour under the canopy at the church's entrance, reminiscing about the good old days.

I had the good fortune of meeting him on several occasions at the Taj Mahal Hotel in the commercial premises of his good friend, Aziz Munna Javeri. In Delhi, on the other hand, we met at Vadhera Art Gallery and chatted for hours on modern and contemporary art.

As my six-decade-long association with the Master comes to an end, several incidents remain etched forever in my memory.

M.F. Husain, along with his contemporaries, started the Progressive Art Group in the 1950s. Each one of the artists wondered when his art would be recognised and fetch a respectable value;

I attended the first auction of Christie's which was held on a ship in the Naval Dockyard Area. It created a huge sensation when a Husain was auctioned for Rs. 10 lakhs (a million rupees) – it made headlines in the art world.

The Master, who had seen his paintings being sold for Rs. 10,000, was pleasantly surprised to see his price climb to a million. Indian Art had arrived;

But that was then. And this is now. From Rs. 10,000, their worth went up to Rs. 10 lakhs. Today, in 2010, his work titled "Five Senses" has sold for a record Rs. 11.69 crores.

A special note on the first ever "Jugalbandi" of art and music

I vividly remember that Sunday morning at Tata Theatre many years ago when Pandit Bhimsen Joshi sang and M.F. Husain painted. The audience was simply spellbound.

During the "interval" the audience went up to take a closer look, to appreciate the painting.

But as soon as the "interval" ended, Husain, to everybody's surprise, climbed on to the stage, picked up a bucket of red paint and splashed it on the canvas!

And then he once again started painting on the canvas – this time on the freshly-splashed red background.

Some of his contemporaries

Husain's contemporaries, whether Tyeb Mehta, Gaitonde, Ramkumar, Akbar Padamsee or Raza, who together formed the Progressive Art Group, had tremendous love and admiration for one another.

Although some of them settled abroad or in different cities in India, they always longed to be in each other's company.

During his last few years when he lived outside India for reasons known to all, he kept himself busy by painting profusely in foreign lands.

What a tragedy and what a shame that India's greatest painter, who was decorated with the *Padma Vibhushan* in 1991, had to leave the country in 2006 and die in exile.

What an irony that the only painter who painted the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *ghats* of Banaras, the Ganga and Hindu gods and goddesses, was accused of hurting the sentiments of those who worshipped them.

But then, as the poet said, the world is not perfect.

Kabhi kisi ko muqammal jahaan nahin miltaa

Kahin zameen to kahin aasmaan nahin miltaa

Husain was a treasure trove of tales and anecdotes whether from the world of art, of films, artists, friends, his muses, anything. It was always a delight to speak to him.

It is unbelievable that the icon of Indian art is no more. Surely, his art will live forever.

Bade gaur se sun raha tha zamana, Humhi so gaye dastaan kahate kahate.



Under the cooling gaze of one of the masterpieces created by Husain. Girdharilal Vaid sits below one of his prized possessions

Golden rice technology was offered to India free of cost, but it was not utilised, alleges Prof. Rao

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“So I shifted to organic farming in 1990 and persuaded 150 other farmers to also do so. Now, we are a group of 20,000 organic farmers in Vidarbha and Orissa. Since 90% of the world is going organic, we have only followed suit. But I am in constant touch with organic, chemical and BT cotton farmers.”

Mr. Mor said that about 60% of Indian farmers were entirely dependent on rainfall. The fertility and water-holding capacity of their land was low and hence the normal yields for most crops were also low. Farmers maintained fertility levels by planting legumes such as *moong*, *tur* and so on which enabled them to fix nitrogen and micro-nutrients to the soil, thereby improving plant nutrition and ensuring higher productivity of cotton.

Turning to GM crops, he said these were introduced in his area in 2004 in the shape of BT cotton. But, he alleged, inter-cropping practices were discouraged in order to show higher cotton yields and to propagate greater use of one particular brand of weedicide sold by an MNC, Monsanto.

BT cotton absorbed more nutrients from the soil, thus rendering it poorer with every plantation. The BT toxin in the seed targeted only the bore worm but resulted in the multiplication of other pests which were only a minor problem earlier. In fact, farmers had to spray the same amount of pesticide for the control of these insects as they did before the advent of BT cotton.

“I have personally heard from farmers in Punjab and Andhra Pradesh of livestock dying after grazing on the BT cotton stocks left in the fields. Thus, by cultivating BT cotton we kill the soil, we kill many organisms and we upset the balance of nature.

“Many BT farmers in Vidarbha are now disgusted with BT cotton because the seeds cost 20 times more than non-BT seeds and because the BT cotton crop requires exclusive fertilization, a very fertile soil and a lot of water at the right time. We have found that only a few farmers who have fertile soil, enough water and money get good yields and even that only for the first two to three years; after that, both the production and the quality fall drastically.”

Mr. Mor pointed out that whereas organic cotton seeds cost between

Rs. 100 and Rs. 200 per kg., BT cotton seeds came for Rs. 1,844 to Rs. 2,066; and because of the high cost, most farmers had to approach local moneylenders for credit; strangely, most of the moneylenders were also seed suppliers who only dealt in BT seeds because of the high profitability.

They assured farmers of high yield from BT cotton and also extended credit. They did not sell traditional varieties and the farmers had no choice but to use BT seeds.

However, since the basic requirements, that is, soil fertility and the availability of irrigation, were not in place, the yield assured by the BT seed companies and the local dealers was not achieved. In most cases, the first picking was good but the next pickings were alarmingly low in quality and quantity.

The farmers had to incur high expenses but failed to get the expected income. The expense on growing BT cotton was about Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 20,000 per acre, as against Rs. 5,000 per acre incurred by organic farmers, Mr. Mor added.

After he completed his presentation, Prof. Rao returned to the lectern.

With over 40 years’ academic experience in botanical sciences, especially cyto-chemistry, behind him and having been associated with the Departments of Botany and of Sericulture at Bangalore University, he was now a consultant on biotechnology and medicinal plants.

He started by making a few clarifications. First, he did not like the term “genetically-modified”; he preferred a more appropriate expression, “genetically-engineered” organisms.

Secondly, he noted, the subject had turned into an emotive issue because no one had done anything to understand it or to sort it out.

Third, he was uncomfortable about the time allotted to him. As a professor, he took his own time and nobody told him when to stop.

Finally, he was uneasy with the term NGO which, in his view, meant “No Good Organisation”.

Prof. Rao said the idea behind genetically-engineered crops was to ensure that the country had more varieties that would help meet its present and future requirements.

There was a time when India had to import food and lived virtually from ship to lip. Today, the country had a surplus but had no clue about

how to protect it and a lot of food was going waste.

But what about the year 2050 when the world’s population would have increased manifold? Would the present level of food production be sustained over the next few decades to meet the challenges of the future?

Clearly, India needed enhanced agricultural output. Genetically-engineered products were being extensively and rigorously evaluated for product efficacy and bio-security as per mandated regulations. Conventional food products, on the other hand, were never analysed for safety.

In other words, the government and the scientists were interested in ensuring the people’s safety. Nobody would spend hundreds of millions dollars (on research on genetically-engineered crops) “to kill a few Indians; there are cheaper methods to do that!”

Prof. Rao said there was vehement objection to genetically-engineered products for various reasons. But more often than not, it was management problems that were projected as technology problems. (The need for irrigation, fertile soil and fertilizers were not technology-related problems.)

Work on 30 crops and 80 traits was going on in the public sector (and not in the private sector alone, as alleged). There were 59 universities, 109 institutions and 63 companies engaged in genetically-engineered crops.

Commercialised BT cotton was already available. BT brinjal had also been evaluated but the government had banned it. Golden rice technology had been brought

to India free of cost, but it was never utilised. Golden rice contained genes that produced beta-carotene which enhanced the vitamin A levels (which was not present in ordinary rice) of the person who consumed it.

Prof. Rao used some slides to show that when the stem of the ordinary brinjal was hollowed out by worms, the farmer lost about 70% of his marketable yield. Often, when the brinjals were bought and cut in a kitchen, they were found to be infested, too.

“Whatever amount of pesticide you spray, there is no effect because the worm is within the stem, within the fruit. The farmer loses, the consumer loses. But if you believe that infested brinjal is tastier, you can have it all the time!

“BT brinjal contains the same gene as BT cotton and it has been around for eight years now. There are several food crops with BT genes eaten in the USA for the past 15 years and no human health effects have been reported anywhere; they have been shown to be safe.

“It (genetic-modification) imparts built-in tolerance to the pest up to 95%, reduces application of pesticide to 77% and reduces the adverse effects of pesticides on the farmers, their families and on consumers, too.”

For this reason, Prof. Rao pointed out, BT acreage had grown from 0.5 million hectares in 2002 to 9.5 million hectares. The marketable yield had increased by 200% and the consumer benefit by up to 60%. The country, too, had benefited economically.

(Continued on Page 7)



Thanks to BT cotton, birds, bees and insects have made a comeback in the fields. Mr. Ajay Jakhar, gentleman farmer from Punjab, speaks in favour of GM crops. In the second picture is Mr. Om Prakash Mor. Opposing the motion, he says he has been pursuing organic farming for more than 20 years

'If India adopts GM, it will lose the \$50 billion organic food market and jeopardise its own food sovereignty'

(Continued from Page 6)

Teams of scientists (numbering over 200) had evaluated GM crops and declared them to be safe and efficient. What was the point in disbelieving them and trusting "some 2% or 5% people who have no sense of science at all?"

Adding a note of caution, Prof. Rao said that he was not projecting BT brinjal as the only solution for the country. BT technology was an important part of integrated pest management and BT crops could be grown along with organic products; this co-existence had been supported by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).

Sadly, the Minister for Environment and Forests had said, "It is for the political system to decide whether to introduce BT brinjal or not". Clearly, he had no respect for over 200 scientists.

What did the activists want?

Prof. Rao said the activists wanted them to trash the combined national and global experience and scientific wisdom behind BT crops and to ban all of them.

And just who was behind the entire campaign? Prof. Rao provided the answer:

"The pesticide industry and dealers, conventional seed developers, organic lobbies, political philosophy (often outdated), mere prejudice, anti-MNC and anti-Americanism, liberal finance (you'll be surprised how much European money comes here to support this activism) and vote bank politics."

Finally, it was the turn of Dilnavaz Variava to take the mike and oppose

the motion. She did it in a calm, composed and convincing manner.

Dilnavaz, who completed her MBA at IIM, Ahmedabad, said she had no financial stake in agriculture. She asserted that had she found BT crops to be good, she would have been the first to accept them because she was interested in the welfare of the country and the people.

There had been a lot of discussion about farmers with sources of irrigation such as Mr. Jaxhar and Mr. Mor, but the problem was that 80% of the farmers in India were small farmers and 60% had no assured source of water.

The Tata Institute of Social Sciences had stated that it was high-cost, high-risk agriculture that had resulted in farmers' suicides. While it was claimed that 90% of cotton farmers were growing BT cotton, what was ignored was the fact that in most cases no other seeds were available to them and they were literally forced to go for BT cotton.

"My own people have tried to get seeds, but they can't get any seeds other than BT cotton in Vidarbha and they can't get these without a packet of chemical fertilizers. They have to go in for high costs. Farmers' suicides have doubled in Vidarbha after the introduction of BT cotton."

As for scientific research, a report of the US Department of Agriculture stated that "Currently available GM crops do not increase yield potential; in fact, yield may even decrease if the varieties used to carry the herbicide-tolerant or insect-resistant genes are not the highest-yielding cultivars".

This was substantiated by the Union of Concerned Scientists' study in its report "Failure to yield", which said that in all GM crops if one took away the yield factor from water and other things that might have increased, in all crops except corn (where there was a 3 to 4% increase), the yield was lower.

Moving to another concern, Dilnavaz said consumers' right to choice of food (BT or otherwise) was under threat. Besides, even on adding all the countries that had accepted GM crops, these accounted for less than 3% of the total agricultural land in the world.

In fact, only six countries accounted for 95% of BT – USA, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, India and China.

European countries had "very, very, very few" GM crops. Consumers refused them. In a recent referendum, Swiss consumers had turned them down. The laws had been made extremely stringent.

They could not give an outright "no" to GM foods without upsetting the Americans who would take them to the World Trade Organisation, or the world court; therefore, they had been enforcing rigid rules for labelling and packaging; they were imposing penalties, too.

None of this was being done in India. Nowhere in the world were 55 crops being put up for (GM) approval as in India. Most of these were popular foods such as rice, wheat, vegetables and fruits. And this in a country where there was no labelling and packaging and where rules were hardly enforced. "You and I will have no choice on what we eat."

What about the environmental impact? The Fish and Wildlife Service in the USA had said that 74 endangered species were threatened because of "Roundup", an herbicide spray from Monsanto.

Dilnavaz said genetic modifications were of two types; in the first, a toxin-producing gene was put into the seed so that there was no need to spray pesticides.

However, as Mr. Mor had stated, experience had shown that subsidiary pests were becoming more prominent. Although spraying for the main pest was going down, spraying for the subsidiary pest was going up.

The second gene was an herbicide-tolerant gene; here, the gene would

tolerate the spraying of an herbicide (produced by the same company). Thus, "Roundup" seeds would tolerate only "Roundup" herbicide. This killed other plants that did not have the "tolerant" gene; further, farmers increased spraying when they found that the crop tolerated that particular herbicide. And this had an impact on the environment.

Other studies, by the New York University Centre for Ethics and Toxics and by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, as also some studies now being done in India, had shown that the BT gene persisted in the soil for months and could have a negative impact on soil microbes.

The growth of superweeds was another unintended effect. The gene intended for, say, corn or soya, was unintentionally transferred to some other plant; that plant then developed the ability to withstand pests and turned into a superweed.

According to another report, over 100,000 acres in Georgia, USA, had been affected by herbicide-tolerant pigweed; Argentina and Brazil had also reported a similar problem.

TIME magazine had reported that large corporations were taking over small companies, destroying their seed varieties and replacing them with their own patented brands. Today, ten companies were controlling 66% of the international trade in seeds; further, they had filed 532 patents worldwide, covering 55 patent families.

"If India adopts GM, not only will it lose its ability to tap the \$50 billion organic food market, it will also jeopardise its own food sovereignty.

"This year there is a shortage of cotton seeds; the increase in seed prices that has taken place is 20%; when it was resisted by Maharashtra, they were told that they would take their seeds elsewhere.

"I think that on health grounds, on environmental grounds and on national sovereignty grounds, we do not have a case for going for BT; on yields and other things, their case is questionable. I think the balance is for a precautionary approach. They can continue their experiments somewhere else, in their laboratories, but not on our tables," Dilnavaz added.

(As stated earlier in this report, opinion in the house was almost equally divided.)



NGOs are 'No Good Organisations' says Prof. Kameswara Rao while supporting the spread of GM foods and of BT brinjal. Dilnavaz Variava, in the second picture, speaks convincingly against GM foods, calling them a conspiracy by MNCs to suppress indigenous seeds

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 FOUNDED 19 MARCH, 1929
 Charter No. 3128, Dated 08 May, 1929
 97-B, Mittal Tower, Nariman Point,
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 Fax.: +91-22-2202 4509
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Two cups between four members. From left in this photograph are Natubhai Brahmhatt, Vasant Manohar, PP Ajay Kanoria and Tarjani Vakil

Happy Birthday



Shahzad Qadir June 21
 Sudarshan Chokhani June 22



Dr. Rajeev Narvekar June 24
 Karl Divecha June 26



Bernd Schneider June 26

Spouses/Rotaryanns

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 Neeta Kapadia June 22
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 Amita Sheth June 24
 Shirin Katgara June 25
 Manek Guzder June 26

**One Profits
 Most Who
 Serves Best**

**Service Above
 Self**

Editorial Consultant: Anmol Purohit,
 Sajjan Sons, 203/204 Triveni, Mith
 Chowki, Marve Road, Malad (West),
 Mumbai 400 064. Cell: 09322227026;
 Home: 022-28880712.
 E-Mail: anmolsp@gmail.com

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