



स्वतंत्र भारत
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17 February 2022

PRESS RELEASE

Launch of the Feed India movement and the Feed India Paper

Mr Anil Ghanwat, President of Swatantra Bharat Party and senior leader of Shetkari Sanghatana launched the **Feed India civil disobedience movement (Kisan Satyagraha #2)** today by planting Bt brinjal seedlings in his farm in SriGonda, Ahmednagar, Maharashtra.

Farmers and farmer leaders from across India and from adjoining areas joined him at the event, including representatives and members various organisation. Supporting organisations include: Shetkari Sanghatana, Shektari Mahila Aaghadi, Swarna Bharat Party, All India Kisan Coordination Committee, BKU (Mann) Haryana, BKU (Mann) Uttar Pradesh, Bharat Krishak Samaj, Rayatu Sangham (Telangana), Rajaji Foundation (Kerala) and Kisan Sanghatan (Madhya Pradesh).

The Feed India movement has the slogan "**Biotechnology to feed India, Natural farming to starve India**".

Mr Ghanwat said that Swatantra Bharat Party is committed to the rule of law but when the laws are unjust then civil disobedience is justified. He issued the **Feed India Paper** to explain the rationale for this civil disobedience. Bt brinjal has been approved by India's regulator, by Bangladesh and by the Philippines. The idea of stopping its use – and other GM crops – is not just unjust to India's farmers and consumers, the moratorium is costing India lakhs of crores of rupees in lost earnings.

Rs. 1.17 lakhs edible oil imports can be reduced

The Feed India Paper shows that it is impossible to feed a growing India only with organic or natural farming, which the Modi government is trying to promote at the expense of biotechnology. Instead, it is the role of agricultural science to provide the best knowledge and technology to produce food in sufficient quantities and of the best nutritional value to feed India and to earn foreign exchange through exports.

Mr Ghanwat gave the example of edible oil to feed India. India imports 13.1 million tonnes of edible oils annually at a cost of **Rs.1.17 lakh crores** because the Modi government does not allow high-productivity GM soyabean and canola seeds in India, even as it **pays rich country farmers to use GM technologies to produce crops which are then imported and consumed in India**. Even GM mustard, which was developed in India and was approved by India's regulator in 2017, remains banned – even though it could have increased oilseeds production in India.

The Paper argues that only **biotechnology** (including modern gene editing) can enable India's farmers to feed India's growing population; to increase farmers' incomes; to reduce consumer prices; to improve the nutritional value of crops through fortification (such as Vitamin A in Golden Rice); to reduce the use of pesticides, fertilisers and water; and to reduce soil tillage which causes soil degradation.

Food safety of GM has been confirmed long ago

Mr Ghanwat said that some misguided people have been spreading misinformation about the bio-safety of GM food but not only have all of the world's regulators confirmed the safety of GM crops, the BJP government has itself declared so in the Parliament. On 19 July 2019 in response to question 4441 in the Lok Sabha, the Mr Modi's government told India's Parliament: "[There is no scientific evidence to prove that GM crops are unsafe](#)".

He said that farmers don't want to feed their own children unsafe food so they are more concerned about biosafety than anyone else. But when developed country food regulators and in India have repeatedly declared GM crops to be safe, then bio-safety concerns should be treated as a mere figment of the imagination. Trillions of GM-based meals have been consumed by animals and humans across the world for three decades without a single adverse event. **Indians consume vast amounts of GM-based edible oils without any harm** – and not just imported. We consume over 1 million tonnes each year of cottonseed oil made from GM-based cotton, grown in India since 2002 (the only GM crop approved for use in India).

Moratorium is unjustified

Bt Brinjal was developed in India and fully approved in 2009 by the India's regulator but in 2010 the Congress government froze the approval and imposed a moratorium. The Modi government is blindly continuing the Congress party's moratorium. In the meanwhile, Bt brinjal has been approved and cultivated on a large scale in Bangladesh since 2014 and farmers and consumers of Bangladesh have benefited. It has also been approved in 2021 by the Philippines regulator. To the extent that Bt brinjal is fully approved in three countries, and its safety profile has been fully confirmed, the act of planting Bt brinjal might be "unlawful" in the eyes of some, but the law (moratorium) is clearly wrong and unjust.

Mr Ghanwat said that on 17 January 2022 he wrote an [Open Letter to the Prime Minister of India](#) asking for the moratorium on GM to be lifted by 16 February 2022. Since Mr Modi has failed to lift the moratorium, no other option was left to farmers except civil disobedience. This is the second round of civil disobedience (Kisan Satyagraha), the first being in 2019.

If the Modi government is serious about reducing our dependence on imported oilseeds, it must lift the GM moratorium and approve not just GM mustard (approved by India's regulator in 2017) but all other GM crops grown anywhere in the world.

But there is no limit to the obtuseness of the Modi government. On the one hand it says India has a shortfall of oilseeds. On the other, it has perpetrated a huge loss on farmers by SEBI banning, in 2021, futures trading in soyabean. The losses incurred by farmers have made them apprehensive about growing oilseeds. Futures market are intended to stabilize prices for farmers and consumers alike, but SEBI is fully captured. India needs honest regulators who consult widely and justify their decisions. The ignorance (and perhaps corruption) of our leaders and regulators is costing us dearly.

The delusional push for natural farming

The **Feed India Paper** details the comprehensive failures of mandatory natural farming. Mr Ghanwat said that with only natural farming at its disposal after independence, India had to beg the USA for food through PL480 imports in the 1950s and 1960s. It was only through high-yielding seeds varieties that the Green Revolution could take place, allowing India to feed its rapidly growing population.

But the Green Revolution has its own limitations, including the excessive use of pesticides, fertilisers and water. The GM and gene editing technologies such as CRISPR have come to the rescue to not only expedite the discovery of more productive and nutritious crops but to create crops that reduce the need for chemicals and water.

The Feed India Paper expresses grave concern about Prime Minister Modi taking about an India “free from chemical fertilisers and pesticides”. If that happens, the Paper argues that millions will fall deeper into hunger and malnutrition. **Only GM technology can improve food security for India** while natural farming will reduce it. An expert committee set up by Indian Council of Agricultural Research has reported that “Large scale adoption of ZBNF – farm practices which exclude all synthetic chemical inputs and promote use of on-farm biomass – would result in ‘tremendous reduction’ in production of agricultural crops thus **comprising India’s food security**”¹.

Sri Lanka’s poor were plunged into distress in 2021 because of their government’s rash decision to ban chemical fertilisers. Its leaders have been forced to reverse the ban and they are now forced to compensate those whose lost their production because of the ban. They have also been forced to come to India’s doors to beg for food.

In relation to the much-touted Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) Mr Ghanwat said that it is a complete failure and can never help either the farmer or the land which is our mother. He said that the originator of ZBNF had to give up cultivating his own land in Amaravati. In his own village there are almost no takers for his ideas. Most ZBNF followers give it up within three years.

He said Mr Modi should not spend any taxpayer funds on any technology, either natural farming or GM. Let markets and farmers work out what’s best for them. Mr Ghanwat said that as an agriculture science graduate he is in favour of all innovative technologies to reduce the use of chemicals but the choice of technology must be left to farmers so long as they use any chemicals in the prescribed manner.

He added that there is a suspicion among farmers that natural farming is being promoted by the Modi government in order to cut its **fertiliser subsidy** bill. But this subsidy is currently helping to reduce the huge negative subsidy that farmers have been getting (a tax on farming) for seventy years, and must only be removed after the full suite of agriculture sector reforms has been enacted and farmers compensated for seven decades of negative subsidy. Mr Ghanwat said that he will release a **Discussion Paper** in the coming months that details the Agriculture policy reforms that are urgently needed to the increase economic freedom of farmers.

Minimal role for government in business

Finally, Mr Ghanwat said that the core message of India’s tradition is *Jahaan Ka Raja Ho Vyapaari, Vahaan Ki Janata Bhikhari*. Where the king is a trader, the people are beggars. Unfortunately, since independence, India’s governments have adopted Karl Marx’s hatred for profit and choked innovation and entrepreneurship, and directly involved themselves in business activity. They should focus only on their duty, their *Dharma* – which is to ensure justice, security and infrastructure. We need *Minimum Government, Maximum Governance*.

He said that it is a basic principle of public policy that a government must not intervene where there is no proven harm. With biosafety concerns well out of the way, the government should move

¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-in/money/news/zero-budget-natural-farming-could-lead-to-yield-loss-panel/ar-AASG3bZ?ocid=msedgntp>

rapidly towards a **light-handed co-regulatory model for biotechnology** and allow farmers and consumers to benefit.

Notes for Editors

Swatantra Bharat Party was founded in 1994 in the tradition of Rajaji's Swatantra Party by Sharad Joshi (who became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 2004). In 2013, Sanjeev Sabhlok helped establish Swarna Bharat Party (<http://swarnabharat.in>). These two parties are now merging to create India's first large-scale liberal party since the Swatantra Party.

An electronic copy of this press release and the Feed India paper is available at:

<https://bit.ly/3GKRIVP>

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