

India Opposes Amendments to Plant Treaty over Sovereignty Concerns

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Plant Treaty Latest News

- The Union government and farmers' groups have raised concerns over proposed amendments to the International Plant Treaty, warning that they may dilute farmers' rights and undermine India's sovereignty over its plant genetic resources.

India Stands Against Proposed Amendments to the Plant Treaty

- As global negotiations on plant genetic resources unfold in Peru, India has voiced serious objections to proposed amendments to the **International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture** (commonly known as the **Plant Treaty**).
- The concerns stem from fears that the amendments would undermine India's seed sovereignty and the rights of its farmers.

About the Plant Treaty

- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) is a legally binding global agreement adopted in 2001 under the **Food and Agriculture Organisation** (FAO) of the United Nations.
- The treaty aims to:
 - **Conserve** plant genetic resources (PGRFA).
 - **Promote sustainable use** of these resources.
 - Ensure **fair and equitable sharing** of benefits arising from their use, especially in research and development.
- India ratified the treaty in 2002.

About the Recent Negotiations

- The 10th session of the Governing Body of the Plant Treaty is being held in Peru from July 7 to 11, 2025.
- An Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group is considering amendments to **Annex I** of the treaty to expand the coverage of the Multilateral System (MLS) to **all Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (PGRFA)**.
- This proposed expansion implies that India and other countries would be obligated to share *all* of their plant germplasm under standard international agreements, potentially overriding national terms and conditions.

Core of the Concern: Sovereignty and Farmers' Rights

- Indian farmers' organisations such as **Bharath Beej Swaraj Manch** and **Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh** have publicly opposed these amendments. They argue that:
 - **Annexe I's expansion** would bring all plant genetic material, without exception, under international access frameworks.
 - This move contradicts the treaty's original mandate, which only facilitated access to a limited list of crops critical for food security.
 - India's **sovereign rights over seeds and plant varieties** would be compromised.
 - **Farmers' rights** to save, use, exchange, and sell seeds would be diluted under a globally determined material transfer system.

Institutional Response and Representation

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has stated that **national interest will be safeguarded**.
- India's official representative at the Peru negotiations is **Sunil Archak**, Principal Scientist at ICAR's National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources and also the **Co-Chairperson** of the ongoing working group.
- ICAR emphasised that Mr. Archak's visit was approved and timely, and he is considered highly capable of defending India's concerns during the negotiations.

States' Role and Constitutional Implications

- Kerala Government has emphasised that agriculture is a **State subject** under Schedule VII of the Indian Constitution.
- The State Government criticised the lack of consultation with State Governments and farmers' groups, warning that the amendments could also sideline **State Biodiversity Boards** and their regulatory role over local genetic resources.
- Such unilateral shifts in treaty obligations, without broader domestic deliberation, risk undermining India's federal structure in agricultural policymaking.

Broader Implications for India's Agricultural Policy

- The proposal to include all PGRFA in the MLS system could:
 - Impact India's capacity to **regulate access to indigenous germplasm**.
 - Reduce incentives for **local innovation** in seed conservation and development.
 - Facilitate **foreign entities' access** to India's rich genetic heritage without proportionate benefit-sharing.
- The proposed Standard Material Transfer Agreement (SMTA), if universally applied, would mean India cannot tailor access rules based on the type or origin of the germplasm, which may have long-term implications for India's **bioprospecting potential** and **intellectual property frameworks**.

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