

# Agreements Subjugating the Agricultural Sector to Imperialist Multi-National Companies and Corporate Institutions

**-Prasanth**

The Narendra Modi government has brought in three black laws that destroy the agriculture sector and farmers in a vicious and illegal manner. To quell the anger of the farmers in the wake of a nationwide farmers' agitation and in the interest of the elections the government announced the withdrawal of the black laws. But the provisions of these laws are being implemented openly. The central government is trying its best to exploit and handover the country's agriculture sector and the peasantry to imperialist multi-national companies and corporate institutions, and provide every opportunity for exploiting and sucking the blood of the peasants. These agreements are part of it.

On 1 Sept, 2023 Indian Council of Agriculture Research and Bayer (Monsanto) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop resource-efficient, climate-resilient solutions for crop varieties, crop protection, weed, and mechanization. They say the collaboration will focus on working together on efforts for agriculture sustainability program by providing quality agri-inputs and advisory services to farmers in a systematic approach.

It is said that the partnership aims to promote resource-efficient agronomic practices in crops, empower small land holding farmers with agronomic advisory, and develop carbon credit markets and develop precision agriculture practices through joint research. Furthermore, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVK) are said to strengthen outreach to a wider farmer base by leveraging technological know-how and expertise through technology transfer and capacity-building programs.

Dr. Soma Marla, Principal Scientist & Head (Crop Genomics, Retd), ICAR said "Though BAYER claims to collaborate with ICAR developing climate resilient and sustainable cropping systems, in contrast, it aims to use farm demonstration firms like KVKs located across India to promote its environmentally harmful weedicides or Genetically Modified (GM) crops to promote its markets".

This means that the Bayer Company will take over 113 institutes and 74 agricultural universities of ICAR across the country and control agricultural innovations, technology, research, seeds and pesticides to further expand GM seeds in agriculture. There is going to be a situation where the farmers will be instructed on the crop to be sown and the usage of gm seeds, fertilizers and pesticides that are suitable for them. The use of GM seeds can cause weeds to grow exponentially. Glyphosate chemical named Roundup, manufactured by the Bayer Company, which is part of the weed prevention chemical herbicides, should be used for this weed prevention. There is no benefit if this chemical is used once and should be sprayed several times, yet it cannot be said that there will be a result. Normal seeds cannot tolerate this chemical. There have been many proved instances in the world that all of Bayer company products are dangerous.

Glyphosate is described as the world's most popular weedkiller. In the US, more than 750 products contain it. When sprayed in fields it equally damages & pollutes soil, microflora, water

bodies, environment and human health. Bayer is facing legal claims focused on the possible carcinogenic risks of glyphosate-based herbicides like Roundup and many other weedkillers.

In 2015, the World Health Organization determined that glyphosate was “probably carcinogenic to humans”. A California judge in 2018 ordered Bayer-Monsanto to pay \$289 million (£ 226m) damages to a man who said ingredients used in a weedkiller had caused him cancer.

In recent decades, soybean production has increased sharply in Argentina. GM crops were supposed to consume less herbicide, but, as weeds have grown resistant, higher quantities of herbicide have been used. While the area of cultivated land grew by 45% between 1994 and 2010, figures from the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation show that the amount of herbicide used in Argentina increased from 19,376 tonnes of active ingredients to 227,185 tonnes - a rise of more than 1,000%.

Some countries and regions - such as Portugal, Italy and the Canadian city of Vancouver have banned glyphosate use in public parks and gardens. Sri Lanka banned use of glyphosate in 2015 - though the tea industry opposes the ban. Also in India, farmers have suffered many losses due to Monsanto’s cotton, maize, brinjal, and other GM seeds. We have seen conditions where crops, soil, environment and health have been severely damaged. As of Dec 2023, Monsanto, now a Bayer division, had resolved close to 100,000 lawsuits over Roundup’s cancer risks. These Monsanto settlements totaled around \$11 billion. In December 2023 - 4,174 Roundup cancer lawsuits were still pending in the California Roundup MDL. Millions of cases are still being reported across the world.

Sales of Bayer agricultural products have fallen due to these cases. Germany’s Bayer AG company says that it has to take a € 2.5 bn (\$ 2.8 bn) hit from a slower demand for its glyphosate-based products, including the controversial weedkiller Roundup.

Bayer’s company is eyeing India’s agriculture sector to recover from its losses with the deal. The farmers will be forced to use gm seeds, fertilizers and pesticides for their crops manufactured by the company. The Centre has lifted subsidies on seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. This is putting a heavy burden on the farmers. The Centre itself is raising the prices of the company products which is breaking the backs of the farmers. But it is not increasing the minimum support prices. For example, in 2020-21, a packet of cotton seeds cost Rs.730/-, in 2023-24, Centre has increased it to 853. In 2020-21, the support price of cotton was Rs.5825, in 2023-24, it was increased to only Rs.7020. Now, the spread of GM crops through this agreement will put an irreparable burden on farmers and damage the environment and peoples’ health.

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2023, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi signed an MoU with Amazon Kisan. It is said to create synergy between the two organizations for guiding the farmers on scientific cultivation of different crops for optimum yield and income which provide technological support to the farmers through Amazon’s network. This MoU in partnership with farmers said this will help ensure access to high-quality fresh produce for consumers across India, including through Amazon Fresh. But the reality is different.

And also ICAR and Amazon will collaborate to extend the latest and most precise agriculture practices that have been developed by ICAR’s extensive research to bridge the technical knowledge gaps in integrated cultivation by leveraging ICAR’s Krishi Vigyan Kendra Knowledge (KVK) network. KVKs strengthen a wider group of farmers by leveraging a technological base through transfer of technology and capacity-building programmes. Additionally, ICAR and Amazon will work together on farmer engagement programs at Krishi Vigyan Kendras, conducting demonstrations, trials, and capacity-building initiatives to enhance farming practices and farm profitability. Furthermore, Amazon will provide training support and assist

farmers in marketing their products through its online platform, facilitating direct connections with consumers.

Cisco, ITC, commodities major's IT arm NCDEX e-Markets Ltd (NeML), Reliance Industries' IT arm Jio Platforms and India's largest fresh produce supply chain firm Ninjacart have signed separate memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Agriculture Narendra Singh Tomar on 15<sup>th</sup> Sept 2021 for pilot projects to help the Centre build a database of farmers in the country.

Through these agreements, in the name of using technology in the agriculture sector, using machinery, scientific cultivation and utilization of modernity by farmers, these companies are going to hand over their produce to farmers through seeds, fertilisers, pesticides and machines online. According to a study, companies aim to generate \$24 billion revenue by 2025 through the online sale of agricultural products.

"It is also a chance to deploy networks, artificial intelligence and machine learning in a developing country, while for e-commerce firms such as Amazon and Reliance, securing a steady stream of farm produce could help crack a groceries market that accounts for well over half of the \$1 trillion in annual retail spending by Indians." – the Hindu Businessline, 17-9-2021

According to this, small traders and owners selling agricultural produce in the retail sector will have to go bankrupt.

Similarly, these companies collect data related to agriculture and farmers on a large scale and intensify their exploitation in the name of providing information on profitable crops and crops suitable for the weather conditions, and control agriculture.

The central government is making all possible efforts for imperialist multinational companies and corporate houses to exploit the agriculture sector as a whole, and the state governments are trying to implement without opposing them. Therefore, farmers, retail traders and people need to fight against the anti-farm actions and policies of the central and state governments as well as against these companies which are trying to swallow up the agriculture sector.