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Pakistan Reviews GMO Soybean Policy Amid Import Concerns

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ISLAMABAD – Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik, has directed an urgent policy review regarding the import and regulation of genetically modified (GMO) soybean meal in Pakistan.

In a high-level committee meeting held on Monday, Malik emphasized the importance of basing policy decisions on scientific evidence. He instructed a comparative analysis to understand why Pakistan's soybean yield remains lower than international benchmarks and

why domestically produced soybean seeds and meals are more expensive than imported alternatives.

The committee also examined potential biosafety risks, including concerns over gene escape from GMO soybean products. Malik called for the establishment of clear safety protocols to protect agricultural ecosystems and food supply chains.

As part of this effort, the minister formed a special committee led by Professor Dr. Kosar Abdullah Malik. The group has been tasked with organizing a national biotechnology conference within ten days to gather expert insights that will shape future seed and GMO policies.

Malik has set a 90-day deadline for the development and implementation of a comprehensive policy on biosafety, biotechnology, and regulatory standards to support sustainable farming and ensure national food security.

The policy reassessment follows a controversial decision in November 2024 that allowed GMO soybean imports from the United States after a three-year suspension. The imports were approved despite the absence of risk assessments for 47 gene events under local environmental conditions, a process mandated by Article 15 of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

This shift effectively reclassified Pakistan from a non-GMO to a GMO-importing country. The decision sparked opposition from various quarters, including former Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Imran Khan, and Shehbaz Sharif, as well as the Ministry of National Food Security and Research.

Environmental groups, farmers' associations, and civil society organizations have also voiced serious concerns, citing the lack of public consultation and transparency.

Critics argue that the policy change was influenced by vested interests, including political figures with ties to the agricultural import sector. The National Biosafety Committee, chaired by Secretary Eazaz Aslam Dar, issued import licenses to over 42 companies, approving the importation of soybean meals containing 47 gene events for food, feed, and processing.

The government's renewed focus on policy integrity and scientific oversight marks a significant development in Pakistan's approach to agricultural biotechnology.