Draft Seeds Bill 2019

Why in news?

The government has invited public feedback on the recently released draft Seeds Bill 2019.

What are the key provisions?

- The draft Seeds Bill aims to replace the Seeds Act, 1966 and regulate the quality of seeds sold.
- All varieties of seeds for sale have to be registered.
- The seeds are required to meet certain prescribed minimum standards.
- Transgenic varieties of seeds can be registered only after the applicant has obtained clearance under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- In addition, the label of a seed container has to indicate specified information.
- The Bill exempts farmers from the requirement of compulsory registration.
- Farmers are allowed to sow, exchange or sell their farm seeds and planting material.
- They do not have to conform to the prescribed minimum limits of germination, physical purity and genetic purity (as required by registered seeds).
- However, farmers cannot sell any seed under a brand name.

What is the key shortfall?

- The Bill contains provisions for the Centre and states to introduce capping of prices.
- It seems that the government is willfully ignoring the lessons of the recent Shetkari Sanghatana (SS) 'civil disobedience' protest.
- In consequence of this, Monsanto withdrew one of its most advanced GM offerings from approval.
- As the Shetkari Sanghatana protest shows, the fact is that the farmers are aware of the benefits of GM technology.
- They are even willing to pay a premium as long as the GM seeds deliver the promised increase in yields, which translates into profits.
- Moreover, companies such as Monsanto invest heavily in R&D to develop products.

- These not only drive up farm profits but also are fast emerging as a key need as climate change effects threaten agriculture.
- So, any move to discourage seed-tech will be anti-farmer.
- Disincentivising seed-tech companies will have the same effect that the price-caps in pharma and medical devices have had.
- In these sectors, companies have just kept their latest offerings out of the market.
- In many ways, losing access to advanced GM tech could seriously undermine Indian agriculture.

Source: Financial Express, Business Line

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