Promoting Innovations

What is the issue?

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- India ranks 60th in a list of 127 countries on the Global Innovation Index (GII) of 2017.
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- It ranks 43rd among 45 countries in the recently-released International Intellectual Property (IP) Index, 2017.
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- The poor record on IP protection calls for appropriate governmental intervention.
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What are the initiatives in this regard?

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- The National Innovation Council (NIC) in 2010 aimed at promoting innovations and making India a hub of innovations.
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- The key mandate of NIC was to formulate a roadmap for innovations for 2010 to 2020.
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- It submitted three annual reports to the government; the last one in 2013.
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- Sectoral innovation councils were set up in 25 major departments of Union government, including the ministry of agriculture.
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- State Innovation Councils were also set up at the state level, as a measure of decentralisation.
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- The present government has increasingly been stressing on its goal of promoting innovations.
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- The Atal Innovation Mission is a notable initiative in this regard.
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How has the progress been?

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- Despite the efforts, the progress of the initiatives and the overall climate of innovations in India is still not considerably optimistic.
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- Despite efforts to decentralise innovation and making it part of overall governance structure, innovative ideas that could be scaled up nationally have hardly emerged.
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- Clearly, government organisations are not suited to bring about any game-changing innovations as they are caught up in routine work.
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- The work of NIC proved that innovations work best in a supporting environment, irrespective of the size or nature of an organisation.
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- However, the prime challenge is the government supporting and protecting innovations in the first place.
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What is the recent impact of this shortfall?

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- One obvious impact created by the lack of support system for innovations is the **rising incidence of illegal sales of Herbicide-Tolerant BT Cotton seeds.**
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- One of the biggest innovations in Indian agriculture in the last 15 years is the introduction of Bt cotton in 2002.
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- Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (MMB), which released the Bt cotton, also intended to release HT Bt cotton (an innovation in Bt cotton).
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- MMB thus applied for approval to the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC).
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- But **before MMB could be granted permission, HT cotton was illegally pirated**, probably from countries like the US, Australia, etc that had already released it officially.

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- These pirated HT cotton seeds were bred in India and several companies sold them in large scale.
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- MMB had written to GEAC and to the concerned ministries and state governments of this illegality way back in 2008.
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- The inaction from the government side led to MMB withdrawing its application, recently.
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- And now, the large scale of this illegal HT cotton seeds trade has become a major challenge for the government.
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What should be done?

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- The rising scale of exploiting the illegal avenues for commercialising innovations undermines the regulatory systems.
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- Government should thus create an enabling environment to safeguard **intellectual property** of individuals.
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- Private and public companies that develop new products and ideas through their own investment must be encouraged.
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- **Regulatory bodies** need to clear the applications for innovative products (like GM mustard or Bt brinjal) with utmost priority.
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- Delaying this process would only give scope for their introduction by pirates.
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- Firm **IP protection laws** and stern action against illegal activities are essential to **boost innovations** as also to ensure credibility in regulatory institutions.
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Quick Facts

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Global Innovation Index

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- GII is an annual ranking of countries by their capacity for and success in innovation.
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- It is prepared by Cornell University, INSEAD and World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).
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- It is based on data derived from several sources, including the International Telecommunication Union, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum.
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HT Bt Cotton

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- Herbicide Tolerant Bt cotton in an innovation in the Bt cotton.
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- It offers the twin advantage of bollworm resistance and herbicide tolerance.
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- In comparison, the approved Bt variety (Bollgard I and Bollgard II) is only bollworm-resistant.
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- It takes care of the weeds problem at a much lower cost than the labour farmers have to engage for weeding.
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GEAC

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- The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) functions in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
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- It operates as per the Rules, 1989, under the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
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- It is responsible for appraisal of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered (GE) organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials.
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- It applies to large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle.
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Source: Financial Express

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