

Legal protection for biotech trials

More and more field experiments and production practices indicate that transgenic plants possess many merits. Up to now, insect-resistant and herbicide-resistant transgenic cotton, maize, soybean, etc. have been widely planted in many countries.

However, the events that destroy transgenic plant trials and their experimental equipment often happen worldwide. In India, farmers protesting against genetically engineered crops destroyed at least seven sites in southern India that were testing transgenic varieties of cotton developed by the US company, Monsanto^{1,2}. In Australia, the 'Free Seed Liberation' destroyed ~100 genetically modified (GM) experimental pineapples that produce higher levels of proteins, vitamins and sugars³. In USA, radical activists recently destroyed corn, sugar beet, sunflower, walnut trees, melons, tomatoes and greenhouses and irrigation equipment at sites belonging to the Davis and Berkeley campuses of the University of California, the commercial companies

Pioneer Hi-Bred and NK Seeds and elsewhere⁴. They wanted to kill the transgenic plants in the bud.

These destructions severely hamper transgenic plant trials and their applications. Only law can prevent such anti-biotech activists from destroying the transgenic plant experiments. The public have to be educated about GM organisms and the destroyers of transgenic plants and trials will be have to be punished.

However, transgenic plants may also be subjected to unknown environmental and ecological risks (although, up to now, no evidence of risk has been found). Thus, GM trials must be monitored, transgenic products must be labelled before being released into the market, and potential risks must be estimated. It is only fair to make these obligations enforceable by law as well⁵.

Recently, a committee of the California State Assembly approved, under the proposed legislation, that anyone who destroyed the transgenic plant trials and affiliated equipment will be liable for

civil penalty⁴. This is a good beginning. Other states and countries should follow this example, and make laws for protecting and monitoring transgenic plant trials.

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NEWS

President Putin's recent visit to India: The road ahead for Indo-Russian Science and Technology cooperation

Present status

The 'Declaration on strategic partnership between India and Russia' was signed on 3 October 2000 at New Delhi by the visiting Russian President, Vladimir Putin and the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee. The Declaration affirmed 'to proceed from a desire to further consolidate their traditionally close and friendly ties to mutual benefit; drawing upon their rich and fruitful tradition of cooperation in various fields accumulated over half a century since their establishment of diplomatic relations . . . '.

In Science and Technology (S&T), Russia and India agreed to intensify cooperation and provide for extension of Integrated Long-Term Programme of Cooperation in Science and Technology (ILTP) up to the year 2010. This agreement was signed by Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister for Human Resource Development, Science and Technology and Ocean Development, Govt of India and Ilya Klebanov, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation on 3 October 2000, in the presence of Prime Minister of India and the President of the Russian Federation. The agreement provides for 'industrial and commercial exploitation

of high technologies emerging out of joint research and development as well as those available with either side'. A mechanism for technology transfer and high technology joint ventures was also agreed upon. It was further agreed to set up an Indo-Russian Joint Council for ILTP that would oversee the joint ventures and technology transfers.

Background to the ILTP

It has been 13 years since the first signing of the ILTP on 3 July 1987 by the then Prime Minister of India and General Secretary of CPSU. Political changes