

Ahead of Obama visit, US rules out embargo, lets India off IPR hook

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New Delhi: The fear of US sanctions over India's intellectual property rights regime has lifted, at least for the moment, with Washington giving it a clean chit after a special review.

In a statement issued late on Friday (American time), the US Trade Representative cited recent steps to remove the threat that had created considerable acrimony between the two governments.

"Over the last few months, there have been multiple engagements with government of India officials at the staff and senior levels on the broad range of issues of concern to the United States and to US stakeholders. India has made useful commitments in recent months, in-



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cluding to institutionalize high-level engagement on IP issues, to pursue a specific work program and to deepen cooperation and information exchange with the US on IP-related issues under the US-India Trade Policy Forum," the USTR said.

The move comes weeks before US president Barack Obama lands in Delhi as the chief guest for the Republic Day parade, becoming the first American president to attend the event. It follows the first meeting of the US-India

Trade Policy Forum in four years for which USTR Michael Froman flew to Delhi last month.

"It's a positive development and it's the right track to follow. India has a well-established legislative, administrative and judicial framework to safeguard IPR, which meet its TRIPS commitments while utilizing the flexibilities provided in the international regime to address developmental concerns," industrial policy and promotion secretary Amitabh Kant told TOI.

For the last few years, the pharma industry has been lobbying hard with US authorities to declare India a rogue country for adopting a policy that has waived patent rights for a cancer drug on the grounds of affordability, besides disallowing patents for several medicines citing lack of innovation. The government has countered this by saying that its policies are in line with India's international commitments.

Apart from the out-of-cycle review by the USTR, the US International Trade Commission (USITC) is also conducting an investigation on India's policies, including those related to duties and investment. The government has, however, refused to participate in either exercise and termed them unilateral actions.

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