

Do not succumb to US pressure on IP laws

US actions jeopardise India's pro-poor patent laws that promote generic drugs production, says an online global petition by civil society ahead of Obama visit

KUNDAN PANDEY



More than 75,000 people have requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi not to succumb to US pressure on Intellectual Property Rights (IP).

With trade and intellectual property rights featuring prominently in the agenda of US president Barack Obama's India visit, civil society groups have expressed concern that talks on these issues are designed to make drugs unaffordable for most patients in India and developing world. There is ever-increasing pressure from the US to dilute India's IP system and thwart generic medicines; this is done in the garb of promoting investment and economic growth in India.

People from 40 civil society organisations, patient groups and global community networks have floated an online petition, and rejected the US actions that could jeopardise India's position as the generic pharmacy of the developing world.

India has been a critical global supplier of low-priced generic medicines to treat diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, cancer and diabetes, which are among the biggest causes of death and suffering. This was made possible only due to India's progressive intellectual property (IP) rights system. Indian generic medicines have reduced the prices of HIV/AIDS treatment by more than 90 per cent, says experts.

However, the US government has been putting pressure



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US President Barack Obama

on India to change its IP policies and to limit the use of public health safeguards enshrined in its domestic laws. If India succumbs, this could have a devastating effect on millions of patients in India and across the world. Since Prime Minister Modi's return from the US in September, 2014, several developments indicate that the US is accelerating its effort to weaken India's pro-poor patent laws.

While talking to media on Thursday, convener of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, Amit Sengupta, said that bilateral mechanisms have been set up through the US-India Trade Policy Forum and a series of meetings have been scheduled to serve to sustain US pressure on IP-related issues. "The institutionalisation of bilateral engagement of IP-related issues provides the US government a platform to push the commercial interests of its corporations," he cautioned. Barack Obama is welcome till he is rep-

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resenting American people, but if he comes as representative of business community, he will be opposed, Sengupta added.

Cautioning the Indian government, Anand Grover, senior counsel in Supreme Court of India and director of Lawyer's Collective, said that US pressure has become visible. "The draft national IP policy released by the government's newly constituted IP think tank is glaringly ignorant and promotes IP as the only solution for innovation and creativity in India," he lamented. "The policy document is completely out of sync with India's ground realities and her devel-

opmental needs."

Similarly, convener of National working Group on Patent Laws, Dinesh Abrol said, "US demands have been crafted with the intention of imposing stronger IP norms on India, in line with the unceasing and false propaganda of US MNCs."

The government must not only reject the US demands but act proactively to address the current public health challenges, he said. Loon Gangte, president of Delhi Network of Positive People (DNPP+) said that his group will continue with the struggle to protect the interests of people. **DOWN TO EARTH**

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