

Activists concerned over US pressure to dilute IP system

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Activists have raised the issue of affordable access to medicines in the backdrop of the visit of US president to India and talks expected on trade and intellectual property rights. US pharmaceutical companies are, according to them, lobbying for relaxation of the patent criteria.

Civil society groups also apprehend that the medicines may become unaffordable for patients if these patent criteria are relaxed. In response to the US pressures, 40 civil society organisations have raised concern over the attempt to dilute the patent laws that could jeopardise India's position.

Lawyers Collective, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, National Working Group on Patent Laws and Delhi Network of Positive People are few of the civil society groups which have raised concern over the increasing pressure from the US to dilute India's intellectual property system and thwart competition from pharma companies that produce generic medicines. Open letters have been sent to the Prime Minister and Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) by these NGOs.

Dinesh Abrol, Convenor of the National Working Group on Patent Laws said "The new patent laws may be in favour of the US corporations which will give strength to the already existing monopolistic trend. This is going to reduce competition and the US corporations may start taking over our domestic pharmaceutical companies which are producing cheap gener-

ic medicines."

According to these NGOs, several developments indicate that the US is pushing for weaker patent laws which are anti-poor. Bilateral mechanisms have been set up through the US-India Trade Policy Forum and a series of meetings have been scheduled for the rest of this year which will only serve to sustain US pressure on IP-related issues. "The institutionalization of bilateral engagement on IP-related issues provides the US government a platform to push the commercial interests of its corporations," cautioned Amit Sengupta, convenor of Jan Swasthya Abhiyan.

Abrol said that in an additional attempt to intensify pressure on the Indian government, the US International Trade Commission (ITC) launched an investigation on India. A second investigation was announced in October 2014, even before the report of the first investigation was released. "The investigation report attacks the use of public health safeguards such as Section 3 (d) of The Patents Act, 1970 and compulsory licensing by India," said Abrol.

"Public health safeguards under the Indian law are the key to preserving the lifeline for millions of people living with HIV who are dependent on cheap generic drugs from India. More than 80 percent of anti-retrovirals used in developing countries are supplied by India. If the US succeeds with its bullying tactics, lives will be lost," remarked Loon Gangte, President, Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+).

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