

Indian drug-makers fear Ebola outbreak will hit Africa business

Africa accounted for 19% of the Indian pharma's ₹90,000-cr exports last year

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Hyderabad, August 28

The pharma industry is concerned over the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West African countries and is in a 'wait-and-watch' mode.

"As per the inputs we have received from the exporting community, business has not been impacted as on today, but the industry is keeping its fingers crossed," P V Appaji, Director-General, Pharmaceutical Exports Promotion Council (Pharmexcl), told *Businessline* here on Thursday.

However, the bigger impact on the industry could be in the form of delays in export processes/deals. "I understand that the exporters are deferring

business trips and other key visits to Africa," Appaji said.

Africa is a key market for Indian pharma industry and accounted for 19 per cent of the total exports of ₹90,000 crore last year, according to Pharmexcl data. South Africa and Nigeria are the top markets for India followed by Kenya, Ghana and Ethiopia.

The challenges lie in managing business interests and safety of employees, especially Indians deployed in marketing and distribution in the continent. Managements will have to take a call on evacuating them, from the affected regions. Global efforts are being initiated to find a quick anti-viral drug to control the symp-



P V Appaji,
Director-General, Pharmexcl

toms and help the affected, as there is no known line of treatment.

At present, the Ebola outbreak is confined to the West African countries of Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Republic of Guinea. The lethal tropical virus has infected nearly 2,700 people, killing over 1,400 since the beginning

of 2014. When contacted, a functionary of Dr Reddy's Laboratories said there were 85 employees of the company in the region, and the present situation did not warrant any 'special' measures. The response was similar from Hetero Drugs, which serves a large market. Most of the marketing and distribution is handled by locals, said a company executive.

Smaller and medium players were 'worried' as the epidemic could impact them more than the big companies. There are over 400 Indian pharma companies with operations in this market and most of them are small and medium enterprises. Earlier this week, Technofab Engineering Ltd said a project for constructing a new oil jetty in Monrovia, Liberia for the West African nation's Ministry of Public Works was hit by the

Ebola outbreak. The project, funded by the World Bank was owned by a French company which declared 'force majeure' and moved out of the project site.

A Tech Mahindra official said: "We have stationed a doctor in our centre in Nigeria on a 24x7 basis. We are keeping a watch and anybody showing symptoms of Ebola is being quarantined. However, no instances of Ebola have been reported."

HCL Technologies spokesperson said it has tie-ups with agencies such as International SOS for all exigencies. "HCL provides regular communication mailers for employees spreading awareness, including travel advisory services," the spokesperson said.

Large groups like Arcellor, Sterlite and others have also been affected.

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