

FROM THE VIEWSROOM

United we stand, divided we fall

India Inc can learn a few lessons in lobbying from its Western counterparts

The US industry, led by its pharmaceutical sector, launched a serious attack on India's intellectual property regime exactly two years back when the country issued its first compulsory license (CL) to Hyderabad-based Nexavar. Since then the protests have been unrelenting, claiming Indian policies are unfair to patent holders and favour the domestic generic industry.

In contrast, the response of Indian industry has been almost non-existent, apart from feeble comments, when solicited, from individual industrialists. It was only after US industry recently suggested that India be labelled a priority-watch country – a distinction reserved for extreme violators of intellectual property and drawing trade sanctions from the US government – that business bodies stirred. Last week Ficci voiced its concerns about American businesses trying to get India designated a 'priority foreign country'. It said that the country's intellectual property eco-system was robust and non-discriminatory. "This a unilateral action to create pressure on India to increase IPR protection beyond the TRIPS Agreement and aims to protect private corporate interests over national interests," Ficci said in a press release.

While this is a step in the right direction, it may not be enough. Indian industry has to learn from its Western counterparts the fine art of lobbying and opinion-building which lays the ground for their governments to take tough actions.

Rarely does a US company fight alone on an issue that has wider ramifications. Numerous business organisations and groups dotting the country come together on most significant issues to jointly fight for what they want. If the fight at hand is big enough, new alliances are forged. For instance, last June, several US business groups launched the Alliance for Fair Trade with India to take on so-called "discriminatory" trade practices against US companies.

Indian business houses have to look beyond personal interests and learn to embrace the power of joint protests. Business chambers need to react fast to developing situations, pre-empt what may happen in the future, and work on building public opinion in their favour. Only when they jointly make a point will their voices be heard.

Amiti Sen Senior Assistant Editor

Patent.