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Domestic pharma innovators plan maiden auction of patented tech

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AHMEDABAD: A herbal drink that tastes like beer, a bio-insecticide product that attracts and kills mosquitoes using bird feather, a transdermal patch for contraceptives drug delivery and a technology that can make a snake venom into analgesic that can help cure neuropathic pain: these are a few samples of patented technologies that will go on auction in India's first-ever Tech Transfer 2010 showcase, exclusively for patented pharma products in Ahmedabad.

The one-day patent technologies showcase has been organised by Foundation for MSME Cluster in alliance with Skyquest Technology Consulting, a private company engaged in facilitating buying and selling of patents in India. If things go as planned, India will soon join the club of elite countries like US, Europe, Japan and Australia, where economic growth is fuelled by technologies bought and sold through auction on a regular basis. This will be one of its kind patented technology transfer platform, showcasing 50 patented novel technologies from across India.

One of the major attractions for the pharma industry will be Gefitinib (Iressa), a drug used in treatment of non-small cell lung cancer and the product is a patented product of AstraZeneca since 1994. As per 2009 annual report of AstraZeneca, Iressa (Gefitinib) generated revenue of \$297 million and is one of the fastest growing products globally. Presently, Natco Pharma manufactures it using a different process method, while Intas Biopharma markets generic version of Gefitinib, after acquiring rights from other company, which also has a different process method.

The interesting part will be that the patent technology showcase will display another non-infringing process of production of Gefitinib, the technology which increases the yield of gefitinib production in less synthetic steps, thus saving cost and time.

According to Shriya Damani, co-founder & CEO of Skyquest Technology, this is probably the first of its kind patent showcase that has been organised in the country, where patent holders (sellers) and companies (potential buyers) will come face-to-face on the same platform to discuss, negotiate and strike a deal.

"There is a huge potential for developing business in patent auctioning as the economy grows, companies need more products to add to their existing portfolio and with patented products the companies can create niche market for themselves," she adds.

Currently, there is no common platform where companies can go shopping for patented products, which is now a common practice in developed countries. Similarly, a large number of patent holders in India are not able to monetise their knowledge as they hardly have any place to go for selling or licensing their patented products. "I have never come across any event organised for patent auctioning in India, which is quite popular in developed countries," said Abhishek Pandurangi, founder of Closer2patents, a patent consultancy firm based in Mumbai.

According to Mr Pandurangi, as per the latest World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) statistics, US got 4,56,321 patent applications filed, Japan 3,91,002, China 2,89,838, South Korea 1,70,632 and European Patent Organisation 1,46,150. While as per the annual report by Indian Patent Office 2008-2009, the total number of patent applications filed in India was 36,812, out of which only 6,161 patent application were by Indian applicants. In the same year, 16,061 patents were granted by the patent office in India.

He further adds the patent commercialisation practice in India is unorganised and there are few online modes of commercialisation and hence it is difficult to record such data.

"My professional experience and observation says that there are quite a few patent commercialisation deals taking place at college and individual levels, facilitated by local law firms/patent consultancy firms," he adds. "Last month's Shanghai patent auction saw sale of five patent portfolios at total value of \$9.61 million, which created a new record and was almost twice the amount bought in last year's auction," says Mr Pandurangi.

"In the West, there are big firms that deal in commercialisation of patents," says Ms Damani of Skyquest, who is optimistic of the new emerging business opportunity in patent selling space. The big names in the world of patent (IPR) commercialising are Yeda Research and Development Company, an Israel based company, and US-based Startel and Intellectual Ventures, the latter having its office in India.

"Its hard to give a figure to the global market size of patent commercialisation. For instance, Stanford University and UCSF have earned over \$250 million over its lifetime from Cohen-Boyer gene-splicing patent, which expired in 1997," she said. She further said in a survey done by a leading US magazine in 2006, it had listed five top universities that turned researched into revenue.

These are New York University (researched related income \$157 million), Wake Forest University (\$ 60.5 million), Stevens Institute of Technology (\$4.56 million), Ohio University (\$3.26 million) and Brigham Young University (\$3.07 million).

"US based universities have turned their research into revenue generating models, making them self-contained. The same can be replicated in India, as the country has a large pool of university and individual research," she adds.

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