
The Forum was inaugurated by Mr. Sikander Bakht, Union Minister of Industry. Dr. S. Narayan, Secretary, Department of Industrial Development, Ministry of Industry, Government of India, Mr. Roberto Castelo, Deputy Director General, WIPO, Mr. Tejendra Khanna, Chairman, Ranbaxy Laboratories Ltd, and Dr. Amit Mitra, Secretary General, FICCI, also addressed the Forum.

Senior officials responsible for intellectual property rights policies and administration from 22 countries of Asia and the Pacific participated in the Forum to examine various issues concerning policy development in the field of intellectual property. Among the Indian participants in the Forum were scientists, academicians, legal professionals, journalists and representatives of public and private sector industries and NGOs.


Addressing the Forum on behalf of WIPO, Mr. Roberto Castelo disclosed that "27 applications have originated from India seeking protection in large number of PCT states in the last six months."

The WIPO deputy chief said that during the last six months India was also designated in some 12,971 international applications filed by applicants from other PCT contracting states. In the month of May alone, 2,892 applications had designated India in their international applications, which was about 53% of the total number of applications filed globally under the PCT system, he said. This, he pointed out, was indicative of increasing importance attached to the Indian economy by intellectual inventors.
Stressing on the need to keep pace with the changes in intellectual property scenario, Castelo said "we have to take stock of the developments that have taken place recently in the field of intellectual property and the changes which are going to evolve in future".

He said the world was entering a new era of intellectual property, characterized by the rapid expansion of demand for new forms of intellectual property protection, greater global coverage and unprecedented growth in the exploitation and use of intellectual property rights, including the non-traditional areas.

WIPO was conscious of these changes and aimed to undertake a systematic monitoring and assessment of key development in relevant fields, so as to formulate a strategic response to intellectual property related concerns, he said.

In his address, Secretary, Department of Industrial Development, Dr S. Narayan, said that the patent law would be finally drafted towards the end of this year. He further said that development of new legislation will arise out of the ongoing discussions with industry and experts. Dr Narayan stressed that legislation should become useful in implementing the law.

In the inaugural address, the Union Minister of Industry, Mr Sikandar Bakht, said that India would insist on adequate provisions for public interest and national security in the forthcoming review of Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement later this year. He said, "We should be able to develop an agenda for intellectual property policy in the context of economic reforms and development, keeping in mind the concerns of developing nations". India was making IPR laws TRIPS-compliant as it did not want to lose out in a technology-driven world, he added. However, "Our agenda has also been tempered by concerns of providing safeguards on the matters of public interest and national security," he said. These concerns would become important as the review of TRIPS commences later this year, said Mr Bakht.

Strong patent enforcement and administrative systems and a vibrant judiciary were necessary to encourage research and development in the country. Making the best use of intellectual base, Indian R&D would expand in the areas of infotech, pharmaceuticals, agro-chemicals and biotechnology, said Mr Bakht.

Capabilities of Indian scientists and technocrats in information technology were recognized world over, said the Industry Minister, adding about 142 companies listed in the Fortune 500 list had outsourced their software requirements from India in 1997.

In this environment of excellence and growth there was need for strong laws which helped scientists and professionals to optimize the returns on their work and encourage the spirit of innovation, he said.

Highlighting concerns of traditional communities in developing nations like India, Bakht said, "it would be extremely essential to calibrate the interests and rights of inventors on one hand and the interests of traditional societies in developing and disadvantaged countries on the other".

Intellectual property and its multi-faceted benefits and opportunities would provide little productive results in an environment of confrontation or disagreement between the developed and developing nations, he said.

Bakht said that the development of international norms in the next millennium on all IP issues, specially the emerging ones, must
taken note of the wide diversities and disparities in marketing structures, marketing performances, dissemination of technologies, comparative advantages and the nation's capabilities in developing and assimilating technology.

In a statement, adopted after the three-day conference, the Forum recognized the need for developing a common platform to echo mutual concerns in various intellectual property fora.

The Forum has stressed the need to facilitate and strengthen cooperation among the developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region in the areas of protection and administration of the intellectual property system.

The Forum dwelt on the imperatives of balancing exclusive rights of individuals with the public interest, and benefits to the civil society. It emphasized on the need to assist developing countries in modernizing their intellectual property systems, including their legislative and administrative infrastructures to enable them to meet requirements under the TRIPS Agreement within the transition period available.

Recognition of developing information technology systems relevant to intellectual property administration as a priority policy consideration for the developing countries including wide dissemination of intellectual property information through Internet, WIPO's information technology programme and projects like the WIPONET and the Intellectual Property Digital Libraries (IPDLs) was one of the major outcome of the three-day seminar.

The Forum suggested the developing countries to harness opportunities offered by advancements in digital technology and to study and examine intellectual property implications related to e-commerce.

The Forum asked the members to rationalize, simplify and develop cost-effective and transparent systems for the enforcement of intellectual property rights.

It also envisaged a multi-disciplinary approach for the co-ordination of intellectual property enforcement, in particular, involving government agencies, judiciary, customs and police, private sector, rights holders and non-governmental organizations.

The Forum acknowledged the need for participating countries to take part in the international harmonization of industrial property laws and procedures, including the study of intellectual property issues associated with new and emerging technologies, the digital environment, global issues and the TRIPS Agreement. More importantly, it stressed on the need to protect and preserve traditional knowledge, innovation and creativity and to promote the sharing of benefits through the effective use of appropriate intellectual property systems.

It also recognized the need to enhance the level of understanding and to consider appropriate means to address global intellectual property issues.

The participants expressed their appreciation to WIPO, Department of Industrial Development, Ministry of Industry, Government of India, and the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry, for the organization of the Forum. This had provided an excellent opportunity for the represented countries of Asia and the Pacific region to exchange views on intellectual property policy concerns. These countries requested WIPO to continue to provide necessary assistance in implementing the priorities identified in the meeting.