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HOW INDIA CAN ENSURE THAT ITS IPR FRAMEWORK REMAINS CONDUCIVE TO BOTH BUSINESS GROWTH AND PROTECTION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS ADOPTING A BALANCED APPROACH?

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1. Introduction

India's intellectual property rights (IPR) framework is a key pillar of its economic and industrial policy, designed to protect creators' and innovators' rights while promoting business growth and innovation. As the Indian economy continues to grow and integrate with the global economy, the country faces the challenge of balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including domestic industries, multinational corporations, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the general public. This balancing act is crucial to ensure that India's IPR regime not only fosters innovation and creativity but also supports business growth and addresses social and economic challenges such as access to affordable healthcare, education, and technology.

2. Understanding India's IPR Framework

2.1 India's IPR framework is governed by a comprehensive set of laws, regulations, and policies designed to protect various forms of intellectual property, including patents, trademarks, copyrights, geographical indications, and industrial designs. Key legislative acts include:

- a) **The Patents Act, 1970 (amended in 2005)**: This act governs the granting of patents and is aligned with the TRIPS Agreement (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) under the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- b) **The Trademarks Act, 1999**: This act provides for the registration, protection, and enforcement of trademarks.
- c) **The Copyright Act, 1957 (amended in 2012)**: This act governs the protection of literary, musical, artistic, and other creative works.
- d) **The Designs Act, 2000**: This act provides for the protection of industrial designs.
- e) **The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999**: This act

protects products with a specific geographical origin.

2.2 The Indian government has also established various institutions and bodies, such as the Indian Patent Office, the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (CGPDTM), and the Intellectual Property Appellate Board (IPAB), to oversee the administration and enforcement of IPR.

3. Balancing Business Growth and IPR Protection

Achieving a balanced approach in IPR protection involves reconciling two key objectives: encouraging innovation and creativity by protecting intellectual property and fostering a business environment conducive to economic growth and development. This balance is critical because overly stringent IPR protection could stifle competition, increase costs, and limit access to essential goods and services, while too lenient protection could undermine incentives for innovation and investment.

4. Encouraging Innovation through Strong IPR Protection

4.1 Strong IPR protection is crucial for encouraging innovation, particularly in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, information technology, and entertainment, where significant investments in research and development (R&D) are required. Patents, for example, grant inventors' exclusive rights to their inventions for a limited period, allowing them to recoup their investments and earn profits. This exclusivity encourages companies to invest in R&D, leading to the development of new products and technologies.

4.2 India has made significant strides in strengthening its patent regime, particularly after the 2005 amendment to the Patents Act, which introduced product patents for pharmaceuticals and agrochemicals in compliance with the TRIPS Agreement. This move was crucial for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and fostering innovation in these sectors. Additionally, the introduction of the patent linkage system and the establishment of specialized intellectual property courts have improved the enforcement of patent rights in India.

4.3 Moreover, India has taken steps to protect traditional knowledge and genetic resources through initiatives such as the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) and the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. These measures help prevent the misappropriation of indigenous knowledge and ensure that local communities benefit from the commercialization of their resources.

5. Promoting Business Growth through Flexible IPR Policies

5.1 While strong IPR protection is essential for innovation, it is equally important to ensure that IPR policies are flexible enough to promote competition, affordability, and access to essential goods and services. Overly stringent IPR protection can create monopolies, drive up prices, and limit access to critical technologies

and medicines, particularly in developing countries like India.

5.2 One of the key areas where this tension is evident is in the pharmaceutical sector. India is known as the "pharmacy of the world" due to its large generic drug industry, which produces affordable medicines for both domestic and global markets. The introduction of product patents in 2005 raised concerns about the potential impact on the availability and affordability of essential medicines. To address these concerns, India has implemented several safeguards, such as **compulsory licensing** and the provision for **pre-grant** and **post-grant opposition** to patents.

5.3 **Compulsory licensing** allows the government to authorize the production of a patented product without the patent holder's consent, under specific conditions such as public health emergencies or anti-competitive practices. India issued its first compulsory license in 2012 for a cancer drug, setting a precedent for the use of this provision to ensure access to affordable medicines. This flexible approach has helped strike a balance between protecting patent rights and ensuring public health.

5.4 In addition, the Indian Patents Act includes provisions for the protection of public interest, such as **Section 3(d)**, which prevents the patenting of new forms of known substances unless they result in enhanced efficacy. This provision has been instrumental in preventing "**evergreening**," a practice where pharmaceutical companies extend the life of their patents by making minor modifications to existing drugs.

6. Challenges and Criticisms of India's IPR Regime

- Despite significant progress in strengthening its IPR regime, India continues to face several challenges and criticisms, both domestically and internationally. Some of the key issues include:

6.1 **Patent Backlog and Delays:** The Indian Patent Office has faced criticism for its backlog

of patent applications and delays in the examination and granting of patents. These delays can hinder innovation and discourage investment in R&D. The government has taken steps to address this issue by increasing the number of patent examiners and introducing expedited examination procedures, but challenges remain.

6.2 Enforcement of IPR: While India has made strides in strengthening its IPR laws, enforcement remains a challenge. Counterfeiting, piracy, and trademark infringement are widespread, particularly in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and entertainment. The lack of effective enforcement mechanisms and the slow judicial process can undermine the effectiveness of IPR protection and deter investment.

6.3 International Pressure and Trade Disputes: India has faced criticism from developed countries, particularly the United States, for its IPR policies, especially in the pharmaceutical sector. The U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has placed India on its "Priority Watch List" in the Special 301 Report, citing concerns about patent protection, compulsory licensing, and data exclusivity. These issues have led to trade disputes and diplomatic tensions, with India arguing that its IPR policies are aligned with the TRIPS Agreement and necessary to protect public health and promote access to affordable medicines.

6.4 Balancing Public Interest and IPR Protection: India faces the challenge of balancing public interest with IPR protection, particularly in areas such as healthcare, education, and access to technology. While strong IPR protection is essential for innovation, it is equally important to ensure that it does not hinder access to essential goods and services, particularly for the poor and marginalized.

6.5 Traditional Knowledge and Genetic Resources: India has made significant efforts to protect traditional knowledge and genetic resources, but challenges remain in preventing

biopiracy and ensuring that local communities benefit from the commercialization of their resources. The enforcement of the Biological Diversity Act and the effective functioning of the TKDL are critical in this regard.

7. Policy Recommendations for a Balanced IPR Framework – To ensure that India's IPR framework remains conducive to both business growth and the protection of intellectual property rights, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

7.1 Strengthening Patent Examination and Reducing Backlogs: The Indian government should continue to invest in strengthening the capacity of the Patent Office by increasing the number of patent examiners, providing specialized training, and adopting modern technology for patent examination. Reducing the backlog of patent applications and ensuring timely examination and granting of patents will enhance the efficiency of the patent system and encourage innovation.

7.2 Enhancing IPR Enforcement: India needs to strengthen its enforcement mechanisms to combat counterfeiting, piracy, and trademark infringement. This can be achieved by increasing coordination between various enforcement agencies, such as the police, customs, and judiciary, and by raising public awareness about the importance of IPR protection. Specialized intellectual property courts with expedited procedures could also help address the slow judicial process.

7.3 Maintaining Flexibility in IPR Policies: India should maintain its flexible approach to IPR policies, particularly in the pharmaceutical sector, to ensure that public health and access to affordable medicines are not compromised. The use of compulsory licensing, the prevention of "evergreening" through Section 3(d) of the Patents Act, and the promotion of generic competition are essential to achieving this balance.

7.4 Promoting Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs): Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can

play a crucial role in promoting innovation and ensuring that the benefits of IPR protection are widely shared. The government should encourage PPPs in areas such as healthcare, agriculture, and technology, where collaboration between public institutions, private companies, and research organizations can lead to the development of new products and services that address societal needs.

7.5 Protecting Traditional Knowledge and Genetic Resources: India should continue to strengthen the protection of traditional knowledge and genetic resources by enhancing the enforcement of the Biological Diversity Act and ensuring the effective functioning of the TKDL. The government should also work with international organizations and other countries to prevent biopiracy and promote fair and equitable benefit-sharing with local communities.

7.6 Engaging in International Diplomacy and Negotiations: India should continue to engage in international diplomacy and negotiations to address concerns raised by developed countries and to ensure that its IPR policies are aligned with international agreements such as TRIPS. At the same time, India should advocate for the recognition of the unique challenges faced by developing countries and for the inclusion of flexibilities in international IPR agreements to address these challenges.

7.7 Promoting Innovation and R&D in Key Sectors: The government should create an enabling environment for innovation and R&D in key sectors such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, information technology, and renewable energy. This can be achieved through tax incentives, grants, and subsidies for R&D, as well as through the establishment of innovation clusters and research parks. With the introduction of the Jan Vishwas Act, several aspects of IPR enforcement have been altered. The **Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act 2023** is part of a broader reform agenda

aimed at improving the ease of doing business in India:

7.7.1 Decriminalization of Minor Offences: The Act decriminalizes certain minor IPR violations, which could potentially lead to reduced deterrence for infringement activities.

7.7.2 Administrative Penalties: For offences now considered minor, administrative penalties replace criminal sanctions. This shift could impact the effectiveness of deterrents against intellectual property theft and counterfeiting.

7.7.3 Potential Catalysts for Innovation: One of the Act's primary benefits is the reduction in regulatory burden. By decriminalizing minor offences, businesses may experience:

a) **Enhanced Focus on Innovation:** Companies can redirect resources from legal compliance and litigation towards research and development (R&D).

b) **Encouragement for Startups:** Startups and SMEs might find it easier to navigate the regulatory landscape, potentially fostering a more dynamic innovation ecosystem.

7.8 Raising Public Awareness and Education on IPR: Public awareness and education on IPR are critical for fostering a culture of innovation and respect for intellectual property. The government should launch awareness campaigns, integrate IPR education into the curriculum at various levels, and provide training and capacity-building programs for businesses, particularly SMEs, on the importance of IPR protection and how to navigate the IPR system.

8. Conclusion

8.1 India's IPR framework plays a crucial role in promoting innovation, protecting intellectual property rights, and fostering business growth. However, achieving a balanced approach to IPR protection requires careful consideration of the interests of various stakeholders, including domestic industries, multinational corporations, SMEs, and the general public. While strong IPR protection is essential for encouraging

innovation and attracting investment, it is equally important to ensure that IPR policies are flexible enough to promote competition, affordability, and access to essential goods and services.

8.2 By adopting a balanced approach, India can ensure that its IPR framework remains conducive to both business growth and the protection of intellectual property rights. This requires ongoing efforts to strengthen patent examination and enforcement, maintain flexibility in IPR policies, promote public-private partnerships, protect traditional knowledge and genetic resources, engage in international diplomacy, promote innovation and R&D, and raise public awareness and education on IPR. Ultimately, a balanced IPR framework will contribute to India's economic growth, social development, and global competitiveness.

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