

Farcical patents

Patenting regimes prevent the theft of ideas and protect intellectual property rights. This gains more relevance when ideas have the potential for commercial exploitation. In academic circles and research institutions those holding a patent are given high recognition and importance. In fact many research institutions and universities have made it a point to reward those who hold patents with promotions, increments, incentives and other benefits. This has led to an ugly competition where people have started patenting everything that is novel in their view, without looking at its commercial viability. In fact such patents are of academic interest only, if at all they are novel

and they could well be published in journals. For example, what is the point in filing a patent if a product worth of Rs 100 (could be sold only at Rs 100) is produced by spending Rs 1000, where the cost of production is ten times more than the product itself? In this case, though the process may be new, if it does not have any commercial viability it would become a farce to patent such processes. Hence those who are involved in performance appraisals should be wary of such unwanted/useless patents during assessments. Similarly, mere filing of a patent, which could be pending with the patent office, should not receive any attention during assessment until the patent is

finally granted. These measures will prevent the mad rush and haste in applying for patents that do not have any commercial value. Though the number of patents filed and granted from India is far less compared to other countries, it does not mean that every sundry claim should be patented.

V. VENKATESWARA SARMA

G1, Ganpath Villa, 67,
Padmavathy Nagar,
Virugambakkam,
Chennai 600 092, India
e-mail: sarmavv@yahoo.com

Mysterious viral deaths among tribals in northern Telangana forest region of Andhra Pradesh

Heavy toll of lives among the tribal people has been reported in northern Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh¹. From 2003 till date, every year between June and August, mysterious viral deaths have been occurring in the tribal areas. Pathological reports showed that the mysterious viral death samples were negative for malaria, dengue, influenza and other known viral antibodies. Hundreds of people, mostly from Agency areas, are bedridden because of viral fever. This is the fifth consecutive year in which viral fever outbreaks have occurred in northern Telangana. In 2003, when the viral outbreak reached epidemic proportions, more than 200 children died of encephalitis.

The 'Chandipura' virus has been identified as the bugbear in instances of viral epidemics in the northern Telangana districts of Warangal, Karimnagar and Adilabad. More importantly, it has been established that heavy deforestation and major construction activities in the forest areas and the Godavari river belt are the causes for this animal virus replicating in humans, chiefly the primitive tribes (Nayakopodu, Gothi koya, Gond, Raja koya,

Chenchu) who inhabit these places². The National Institute of Virology, Pune has identified the Chandipura virus as the culprit³, which has a deadly mortality rate of 50–90%. The sand fly (*Phlebotomus* sp.) is its vector, which is in abundance in the forests. Due to unchecked encroachment of the habitat of sand fly-carrying wild animals, they move closer to human habitations, which is also a cause for decrease in their number. The existence of this vector close to human habitations in forest areas is the cause of spread of viral fever through the Chandipura virus. It was observed that children are more susceptible to the fever that manifests within 48 h. There is a dire need for the establishment of at least a virology field laboratory in the tribal areas. Investigation of rural cycle (mosquito–animal–mosquito) and urban cycle (mosquito–human–mosquito) in these forest areas is also important in the isolation and characterization of mysterious viruses and vectors. Use of computer software related to geographical information system and satellite images from remote sensing will reveal in detail the mosquito breeding sites and disease dynamic maps to

prepare 'route maps' to inhibit the transfer of the pathogenic virus. There is an urgent need to advance the supply of rapid detection kits to field technical staff of the medical units, supply of insecticide-treated mosquito nets and gearing up the sanitation machinery in view of the rainy season ahead.

1. Radhakrishna, M., Krishnareddy, M. and Ramreddy, S., *Curr. Sci.*, 2006, **91**, 570–571.
2. *The Hindu*, 10 February 2009.
3. *Virology Bulletin*, National Institute of Virology, Pune, accessed on 12 February 2009.

MUTTINENI RADHAKRISHNA^{1,*}
MAHENDER AILENI²
P. GOVERDHAN³

¹Department of Zoology,

²Department of Biotechnology, and

³University College of Pharmaceutical Sciences,

Kakatiya University,
Warangal 506 009, India

*e-mail: muttinenirk@gmail.com