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New technology can check whether your medicine is fake

Soon, you could do an ID check for drugs

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New Delhi, 12 March

The technology to differentiate between genuine and fake drugs would soon be at your disposal. The move comes at a time when the domestic pharma industry is battling with issues relating to quality of drugs, within and outside the country.

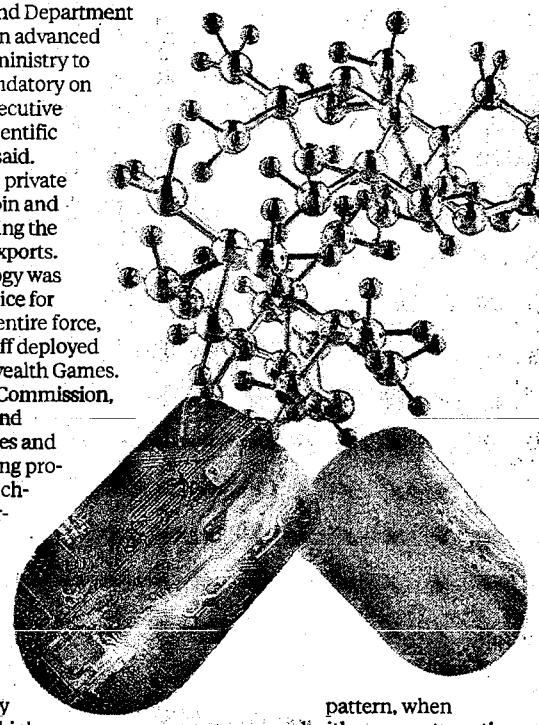
While India is struggling to monitor counterfeiting, various government departments such as health, fertilisers, education and others are planning to adopt non-clonable identification (nCiD) technology in various projects and products, including medicines. This technology will not only prevent duplication of identification or packaging but also enable consumers and regulatory agencies to test genuineness of a product.

Bilcare, innovator of the nCiD technology, has licensed it to public sector enterprises such as the Telecommunications Consultants India (TCIL) and Indian Telephone Industries (ITI) which are implementing it in government and private sectors. While the technology is already installed by many of the government departments and agencies such as Delhi Police and Department of Fertilisers, TCIL is in advanced talks with the health ministry to make nCiD labels mandatory on medicines, Bilcare Executive Director and Chief Scientific Officer Praful R Naik said.

According to Naik, private sector companies Lupin and Biocon are already using the technology for their exports.

The nCiD technology was also used by Delhi Police for identity cards for the entire force, as well as for other staff deployed during the Commonwealth Games. Besides, the Election Commission, National Jute Board and Department of Supplies and Disposals are evaluating proposals to induct the technology for various purposes.

The nCiD chips comprises nano-micro particles of diverse size of several metals. When a micro quantity of this metal composite is randomly embedded on to the chip's base, it creates a distinctly unique and non-reproducible pattern. This



pattern, when scanned with a magneto-optic sensor, results in generation of a complex magneto-optic digitised image information, which enables real-time communication through internet or mobile gateways. For instance, once nCiD chips are installed on medicine packs, consumers can access details such as its manufacturing site, date of manufacturing, expiry, etc, through a nCiD reader available with the chemist.

"Such a unique feature is completely non-reproducible even by the inventors themselves and, hence, non-clonable. This unique feature of non-reproducible pattern which can talk and communicate sets the nCiD chip apart from other communicable embedded security measures like smart chips or non-communicable authentication technology," says Naik.

He says India has a potential market of at least ₹1,000 crore for nCiD technology. Bilcare has a manufacturing facility in Singapore, with a capacity to produce four billion chips. Apart from India, it is currently supplying to Indonesia, China and Australia from this factory. With a portfolio of 25 patents worldwide on the technology, Bilcare is planning to introduce it in other countries.