

One year on, pharma industry still knocking at ministries' doors

Industry complains of lack of interaction with key ministries

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The United Progressive Alliance Government may have clocked a year, in its second term at the Centre.

But the country's Rs 1-lakh-crore pharmaceutical industry still waits for a formal interaction with its key ministers in the Chemicals and Fertilizers, Health and Commerce Ministries, respectively.

The Government has brought in the right to information, employment and now education - but what about enforcing the right to healthcare, asks the head of a leading drug-maker, pointing out the lack of involvement by the heads of these key ministries and the industry.

Between the three minis-

tries, they govern the local manufacture, import and export of medicines, its quality, efficacy, pricing, patent-related protection and the subsequent exclusivity on sales - in short, they control policies governing a key stake-holder in the country's health.

And yet, a year later, industry associations are still knocking at the doors of ministries, seeking meetings with their ministers at the helm - the Chemicals and Fertilizers' Mr M.K. Alagiri, Health's Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad and Commerce's Mr Anand Sharma, industry representatives told *Business Line*.

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In its letter to the Union Health Minister, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad last month, the Indian Drug Manufacturers As-

Bitter dose

IDMA has voiced concern over misuse of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act amendment on spurious drugs.

IPA has sought meeting with ministries on improving local regulatory norms and IPR related issues

sociation (IDMA) had sought a meeting to voice its concerns on the Drugs and Cosmetics Act amendment on spurious drugs and how it could be misused by "indiscreet drug inspectors against genuine manufacturers".

Also on its list of concerns, are clinical trial issues on fixed-dose combination medicines (where medicines are

combined to form a single drug) and patent-related worries on the import and manufacture of medicines.

IDMA is a platform for small and mid-sized drug-companies in the country, but its woes in not being able to have a formal meeting with the Health Minister are shared by two other large pharma industry associations - the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) and the Organisation of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI), as well.

In fact, the IPA has sought formal meetings with the three key ministers to raise issues on improving local regulatory standards, besides the several Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)-related "barriers" that domestic-drug

makers face in overseas markets, an official said.

The IPA represents large domestic drug-makers while the OPPI is a platform for multinational drug-makers.

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The country faces major healthcare concerns like the affordability of medicines, how accessible they are to the local population, unresolved issues on price control and a spate of IPR-related concerns that confront drug-makers, in the country and overseas.

A greater involvement by the key ministers could help drive policies and resolve pending issues, besides helping devise strategies to tackle the healthcare challenges facing the country, say industry representatives, undivided in their complaints.

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