

Public Policy Workshops

GANESAN BRIEFS MPS ON PATENTS BILL



Intellectual property protection is in the interests of indigenous R&D and product development, hence the Lok Sabha must adopt the Patents Bill, 1999 without any hesitation. Expressing this opinion to a group of Members of Parliament, representatives of

various political parties and NGOs, policy makers, economic journalists and academics, Mr. A. V. Ganesan, Advisor to Government of India, presented a discussion paper on "The Implications of the Patents (Amendment) Ordinance, 1999" at a policy workshop organised by ICRIER on February 16 on the eve of the Lok Sabha vote on the Patents Bill. The meeting was chaired by Dr. R. A. Mashelkar, Director General, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and Secretary, Ministry of Science and Technology. Participants included Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. Anil Shastri (Congress Party), Mr. Indrajit Gupta (CPI), Mr. Jaipal Reddy (Janata Dal), Mr. Arun Shourie, Mr. Ranbir Singh, Mr. Ramakrishna, Mr. N. N. Jha, and Mr. Jagdish Shettigar (BJP), apart from officials from the Commerce Ministry and the Drug Controller's office. The paper and proceedings of the workshop were printed and distributed to all Members of Parliament on March 1, 1999. The Parliament approved the bill on March 8, 1999.

As India has agreed to accept applications for product patents of pharmaceuticals and agro-chemicals with effect from January 1, 1995, the Exclusive Marketing Rights (EMR) provision is a self-extinguishing provision which is applicable until January 1, 2005. Spelling out the limited impact of the grant of EMRs in the interim period, Mr. Ganesan argued that India's attention should be focussed not so much on the EMRs but on the more important second step of how to reform the product patent system while addressing our public interest concerns.

CHANGING VIEWS ON CAPITAL CONTROLS

A Workshop was held on March 8 around a paper entitled "Changing Views on Capital Controls" by Dr. Jeffrey Frankel, former Member of the Council of Economic Advisors to the US President, currently holding the New Century Chair at Brookings Institution and scheduled to join the faculty of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Former Finance Minister, Mr. P. Chidambaram chaired the workshop, which was cosponsored by the IFCI.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EAST ASIAN CRISIS AND INDIA

While capital account controls helped India partly insulate herself from the fall-out of the Asian economic crisis, India remains vulnerable as long as it does not reform its financial sector and pursue prudent fiscal and banking policies. This view was expressed at a workshop at ICRIER on the "Implications of the East Asian Crisis for India" by Dr. V. V. Bhanaji Rao, Senior Fellow, Public Policy, National University of Singapore. Dr. Rao argued that when a government was able to deal early and effectively with what was initially a banking sector problem, the impact of the crisis can be contained. However, where public policy failed, a banking crisis snow-balled into a financial crisis and then into a payments crisis and in some cases even into a larger economic and political crisis.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

A major public policy workshop on January 28, 1999, centred around the World Bank report on "Global Economic Prospects and Developing Countries, 1998-99" on January 28. Presentations by Dr. Uri Dadush and Dr. Deepak Dasgupta, of the World Bank were followed by comments from two discussants, Professor Suresh Tendulkar of the Delhi School of Economics and Dr. Sanjaya Baru of ICRIER. The workshop was jointly organised by ICRIER and CII. Participants included representatives from the private sector, economists, policy makers and members of the media. The discussion was moderated by the Commerce Secretary, Mr. P. P. Prabhu, who was in the chair.