

India foils Spanish co's patent bid for Vitiligo cure

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New Delhi: India has for the first time ever managed to foil a bio-piracy bid in a record three weeks time.

Thanks to the recently created Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL), which has till now completed documenting over two lakh medical formulations of Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani to save them from piracy, European Patent Office (EPO) has cancelled its earlier "intent to grant patent" order to a Spanish company on use of melon extract to cure vitiligo (leucoderma) — a disease that causes skin de-pigmentation to almost 65 million people globally.

Interestingly, under India's ancient Unani system of med-

Understanding Disorder

What is Vitiligo?

▶ Vitiligo is a pigmentation disorder in which melanocytes in the skin are destroyed. As a result, white patches appear on the skin in

different parts of the body

Who is affected by vitiligo?

About **65 mn** people have vitiligo. Half the people who have vitiligo develop it before age 20

▶ Indian hakeems

under the Unani system have been using an extract from melon for hundred years to cure



What causes it?

▶ There is evidence that people with vitiligo inherit a group of three genes that make them susceptible to depigmentation. Some say vitiligo is a disease in which a person's immune system reacts against the body's own organs or tissues. So proteins called cytokines that are produced within the body alter their pigment producing cells and cause these cells to die

icine, *hakeems* have for hundreds of years been using melon extract to cure this disease. Michael Jackson was world's most famous vitiligo patient. After studying India's documents available in TKDL which confirmed "evidence of prior art", EPO has decided against granting patent for the anti-vitiligo cream to the Spanish company Perdix group SL.

Earlier patent related challenges made by India lasted years. Among the famous were patent application over neem's anti-fungal properties which took India 10 years to revoke, the patent application on the wound healing properties of turmeric which took three years, and that of Basmati rice against an US-based company which took well over a year.

A health ministry official said: "This is victory for us. TKDL, which has documented and translated knowledge of traditional Indian medicines from Hindi, Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Tamil to five international languages — English, Japanese, French, German and Spanish — will help in fighting foreign companies and countries from claiming patents over information and practices already available in India." In order to confirm EPO's order, TOI scanned through its website and found that application no. EP1747786 titled, "Natural product in cream with anti-vitiligo (leucoderma) therapeutic properties", was filed by Perdix Euro group SL, Spain, in July 2006.