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India foils Danish firm's bio piracy bid

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: After stopping the Chinese from patenting pudina's health benefits, India has now foiled a major bio piracy bid by a Danish company to patent ginger, jeera (cumin), onion and turmeric's fat-burning properties.

Claras ApS, a Danish company, on September 19, 2007 filed a patent application at the European Patent Office, saying its invention of turmeric, cumin, ginger and onion as slimming agents was novel. But the **Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)**, with the help of India's **Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)**, dug out formulations from ancient Ayurveda texts dating back to the 5th century, which contained formulations involving their use for ages in India, as fat burners.

Director of TKDL V K Gupta submitted a letter to EPO on August 25, 2009 to inform the examiners that all the four have long been known in Indian systems of traditional medicine for their use as slimming agents or fat destroyers. **CSIR's** letter to EPO said, "The patent application number EP2044850, titled method for altering the metabolism characteristic of food products, may be referred to wherein usefulness of a herbal composition of Zingiber officinale (ginger), Allium cepa (onion), Cuminum cyminum

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(cumin seed) and Curcuma longa (turmeric) on being added to a food product as a slimming agent by altering digestion characteristic/metabolism characteristic of the food product has been claimed to be novel."

The letter was accompanied with evidence from age-old Indian medicinal texts. "Following India's intervention, the Danish company was not left with any option except to withdraw its patent and claims. Accordingly, the company decided to withdraw its three-year-old application," a health ministry official said.

In 2000, the **TKDL** expert group estimated that about 2,000 wrong patents concerning Indian systems of medicine were being granted every year, mainly due to the fact that India's medicine knowledge existed in languages such as Sanskrit, Hindi, Arabic, Urdu, Tamil etc and was neither accessible nor understood by patent examiners.