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EID MUBARAK

CYCLING AUTHORITY ASKS ARMSTRONG TO RETURN \$4M TOUR PRIZE MONEY 17

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OBAMA BECOMES FIRST US PRESIDENT IN OFFICE TO CAST EARLY VOTE 14



Indian firm loses jamun patent

Sidhartha | TNN

New Delhi: After combating the bio-piracy of neem and haldi in the US and Europe, India has now woken up to the problem in its own backyard. In the first such move since 1994, the government has revoked a patent granted by the Indian Patents Office for a medicine made from the extract of jamun, lavangpatti and chundun meant to treat diabetes.

Using a "rarest of rare" provision in the Patents Act, the government decided to quash the protection that drug-maker Avesthagen had got earlier this year, saying the patent right was "mischievous to the state and generally prejudicial

NOT A NOVELTY?

► Govt revokes patent to Avesthagen for medicine made from extract of jamun, lavangpatti, chundun to treat diabetes

► Company argues "invention" novel, provided scientific validation to traditional knowledge

► Govt says it's known that plants are used for management of diabetes and there was no invention



to the public" as it was an "Integral part" of the ayurveda, unani and siddha system of medicine. The on-

ly other time the provision was used was to cancel a patent given to a US firm for developing cotton cells by tissue culture.

But this time, the patent given to the mix of jamun, lavangpatti and chundun was proving to be a major embarrassment as India has for long fought for protecting traditional knowledge and genetic resources and sought to check piracy of ayurvedic and other traditional forms of medicines. What is even more curious is how the Indian Patents Office gave the protection after the government had successfully got European authorities to turn down the application two years ago.

► More patents to be revoked? P 15

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THE TIMES OF INDIA, KOLKATA | SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2012

More 'wrong patents' may be revoked

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While the problem seems to have been dealt with at least for the moment, there could be more in store as the government has discovered that there are at least four or five similar instances of patents given to medicines over the last five years or so that have been "developed" using commonly used plants and fruits ranging from amla, methi, karla and ashwagandha.

"In one case, we have established that the patent was wrongly given. We are investigating the others and if we find similar problems, we will deal with it," an official said.

Cancelling the patent given to Avesthagen was not easy as the company argued that the extracts, which work individually in managing diabetes, had an aggressive effect when combined. In addition, it used an approach that is "innovative, novel and scientific" in developing a formulation and screened it for efficacy and safety using modern technology.

Defending the patent, the company told the department of industrial policy and promotion that it developed the formulation from three plants after it had originally identified some 100 plants, which were shortlisted to 10.