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India to showcase mission to protect traditional knowledge

New Delhi, Mar 21 (PTI) India will showcase its unique mission to curb bio-piracy and share its experience of protecting traditional knowledge in front of representatives from 38 countries at an international conference here.

The conference -- "Utilisation of the **Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL)** as a Model for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge" -- will be inaugurated by Science and Technology Minister P K Bansal here tomorrow.

"India is the only country in the world to have set up an institutional mechanism -□ **TKDL**, to protect its traditional knowledge and to prevent grant of wrong patents," **Vinod Kumar Gupta, Head of TKDL** told PTI.

He said India will share its experience in protecting traditional knowledge from being used for acquiring patents at the three day conference, which will also be attended by Francis Gurry, Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).

Under Gupta's direction more than 150 experts in traditional medicine, law and computer science spent the past ten years arranging and classifying the **TKDL**.

The **TKDL** database includes 54 authoritative textbooks on ayurvedic medicine, nearly 150,000 ayurvedic, unani and siddha medicines, and over 1,500 physical exercises and postures in yoga.

TKDL is being used as a ready reckoner by patent examiners to compare patent applications with existing traditional knowledge.

Before the advent of the **TKDL**, any bio-prospector for a pharmaceutical company could dig up ancient medical wisdom and lay claim to the practice's healing ability without consequence.

Prominent cases of patent disputes include a US patent on the wound-healing properties of turmeric which was revoked in 1997 as well as an anti-fungal product from the Neem tree (revoked in 2008).

Both herbal practices were evidence of traditional knowledge and the patents were rescinded.

Through **TKDL**, India is capable of protecting about 2.26 lakh medicinal formulations similar to those of neem and turmeric.

On an average, it takes five to seven years for opposing a granted patent at international level which may cost upto half a million dollars.

Since July 2009, **TKDL** team has so far identified about 230 patent applications at European Patent Office which concern Indian systems of medicine and filed third party evidences.