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Regional trade meet should not pave way for monopoly in drugs: Doctors without borders

Rosamma Thomas | TNN | Dec 10, 2016, 05.26 PM IST

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Pharmacy Without Borders

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Representative Image.

JAIPUR: Negotiators from 16 countries of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are meeting at Tangerang, Indonesia. Doctors Without Borders/Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) and other health groups, days ahead of the meeting, reiterated concerns about "harmful intellectual property provisions in the proposed agreement that

would increase market monopolies for pharmaceutical corporations and delay or block access to affordable generic medicines".

With ratification and implementation of the highly controversial Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement increasingly in doubt, countries in the Asia-Pacific region are focusing on the RCEP trade agreement, which contains similarly damaging provisions for access to medicines.

"With the TPP trade agreement on life support - and the plug expected to be pulled any time now - RCEP could be the new benchmark for the 'worst-ever trade agreement for access to medicines," said Loon Gangte, coordinator, International Treatment Preparedness Coalition, South Asia. "The potential inclusion of heightened intellectual property provisions in RCEP could endanger millions of people around the world who rely on generic competition in India to deliver affordable, life-saving medicines."

MSF in the press release expressed concern that "countries such as Japan and South Korea will now increase pressure to ensure many provisions that expand monopolies on medicines are included in the RCEP agreement."

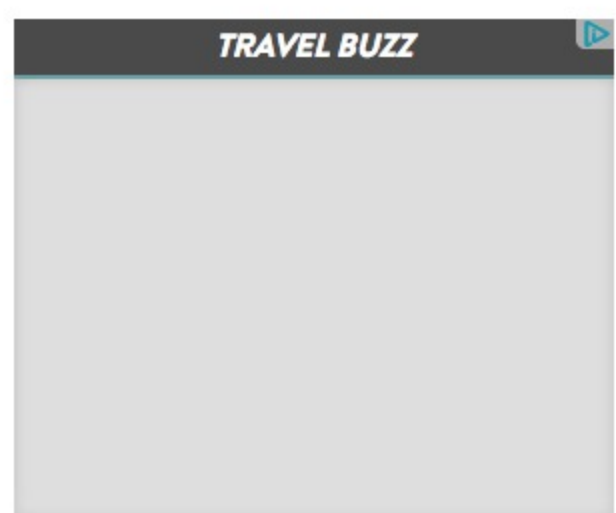
The press release said, "These proposed provisions go far beyond the World Trade Organization's international requirements for intellectual property and serve to extend pharmaceutical corporations' patent terms and introduce additional market monopolies based on clinical data (data exclusivity). These harmful clauses could severely affect access to affordable medicines by restricting generic competition in the region and globally. Ever-increasing pressure on India to agree to harmful intellectual property provisions in this trade agreement is particularly concerning, as competition from Indian generic medicine manufacturers has been instrumental in bringing the price of life-saving first-line HIV medicines down by 99% since 2001."

"People living with HIV are facing increased mortality rates because of co-infection with tuberculosis or hepatitis C, and there's a lack of access to new drugs to treat these diseases either because of patent monopolies resulting in high prices, or regulatory barriers," the release quotes Dr Maria Guevara, Regional Humanitarian Representative (ASEAN) for MSF as saying. "The UN recently warned countries to scrutinize all trade deals for their impact on public health, and I strongly urge all RCEP countries to reject any provisions that could restrict access to medicines or impede the ability of governments to meet their public health obligations."

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