

India, South Africa moot 3-year Covid patent waiver

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NEW DELHI: India and South Africa, along with several poor and developing countries from Africa and Latin America, have proposed a three-year patent waiver for Covid-19-related health products and technologies, including drugs and vaccines, along with “their material or components and their methods and means to manufacture”.

The submission made on Friday goes beyond drugs and vaccines to include diagnostics, therapeutics, medical devices, personal protective equipment with the coverage proposed to include “the prevention, treatment or containment of Covid-19”.

Trade experts said that the proposal – which will form the basis for negotiations – has clearly provided a window for technology and know-how sharing, which is a major concern with suggestions that patent waiver alone will not result in production of vaccines or drugs. Besides, by including material and components, the idea is to ensure that there is access to the entire value chain.

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While India and South Africa were the original proponents of waiver of Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

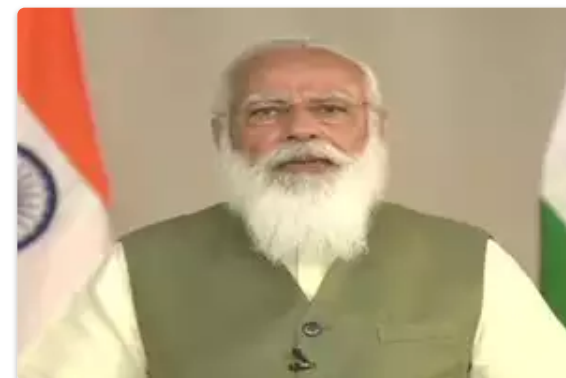
(TRIPS), which also includes relaxations in rules related to copyrights and designs, they now claim the support of over 120 countries, including Pakistan and Indonesia.

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China is seen to be coming out in support of the proposal and the government is trying to get Brazil on board. Separately, the United States, which recently announced its support to negotiations for a waiver for vaccines, has also reached out to countries such as Japan and Switzerland with the European Union too willing to engage in discussions.

120 NATIONS' SUPPORT

➤ **India-SA's proposal goes beyond Covid drugs & vaccines to include diagnostics, therapeutics & medical devices**

➤ **They claim the support of over 120 countries, including Pakistan and Indonesia. China is seen to be coming out in support of plan and govt is trying to get Brazil on board**

➤ **US has also reached out to countries like Japan willing to engage in discussions**

“The submission is absolutely clear. The idea is consolidation of the proposals, providing clarity and assertion of the intent. India and the others have made it clear that they are seeking a three-year window while there was discussion in the US around 16-18 months,” said Sachin Chaturvedi, who heads Research and Information Systems for developing countries, a think tank.

“Three years provide clarity to companies looking to work on producing vaccines or drugs over the medium term. India needs to redouble our efforts on the diplomatic front and ensure that the developed countries do not link this to negotiations on other issues at the WTO,” added Biswajit Dhar, a professor at JNU.

India and the others have argued that there is threat to human health, safety and well-being due to Covid-19 resulting in unprecedented and multifaceted effects, including the severe disruption to societies, economies, global trade and travel and the devastating impact on the livelihoods of people.

At the same time, they recognised the importance of preserving incentives for research and innovation, but added that they needed to be balanced with public health interest.