**Patents-Challenges and Opportunities for Pakistan**

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The Knowledge Economy is all about intellectual capital and refers to the ability to capitalize on scientific discoveries and applied research through creativity, ideation, research, and innovation, which is nurtured in an enabling Intellectual Property (IP) environment. IP is now firmly a key and integral part of the global economy. Accordingly, it is vital for Pakistan not to be left behind and a must to maintain its competitive potential. The world has rapidly moved from the trading of goods to the trading of ideas. A registered software earns more than a hectare of land earns from producing grain. The IT exports of India are equal to the oil exports of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia last year.

In India, a total of 31,261 patent applications were granted in 2022 marking an increase of roughly 2.72% from 2021 and the number of patent filings increased from 42,763 in 2014-15 to 66,440 in 2021-22 due to steps taken by the government to strengthen intellectual property rights (IPR) regime of the country. The case of Pakistan is very weak in this regard. The role of IP is therefore critical in the national economy, development, and national security. As we are becoming increasingly dependent on technology in all walks of life, the value of research and innovation is vital. Equally, the protection and promotion of national resources become crucial to harness national wealth. This can only take root and flourish if a strong IP system is in place. A stable IP environment becomes a magnet for future creativity, research, and innovation and provides opportunities for the youth of Pakistan. It also places the country in a positive direction for national and international investors because it accords a positive image of development and sophistication. A country that creates and innovates will succeed. Efficient management and effective enforcement of IPRs are therefore directly linked with the national economy, an image of fair practices, and business acumen in line with the global standards of the country. Last year, IPs filed by Pakistani scientists, researchers and inventors are very low as compared to other developing countries and Pakistan also missed another train in this sphere as we missed many other trains in past in various sectors and walks of life. The role of IPO, in Pakistan, is crucial in this era to give proper guidance, support, help, and facilitation with dedication and commitment to inventors, innovators, researchers, scientists, businessmen, institutes and universities. Only those nations, societies, and countries that will grow and prosper will focus on intellectual property.

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The increasing gap between developed and developing countries and within societies will only widen to the detriment of everyone. Whole segments of society within any country cannot be excluded from technological change and innovation. The COVID pandemic was deadly and has simultaneously highlighted the complex and unavoidable interconnectivity of all countries and the necessity of digitization to keep the world moving. The future of any country is to give grassroots awareness of the potential of IP as early as at the school, college, and university levels. Yet awareness of IP remains a challenge in Pakistan’s schools, colleges, and universities and there have been some positive developments, but much remains to be done. The younger generation absolutely must be in step with global knowledge and standards. Formal teaching and incorporation of the subject into the curriculum is critical to developing the mindset of coming generations so as not just to innovate but encourage them to secure the protection of their IPRs and protect rights to the nation’s traditional Knowledge and Heritage and not allow others to appropriate what is rightfully theirs. Although IP is already being taught in some institutions, IPO-Pakistan needs to focus on and systemic strategy to introduce the subject as full formal degree qualifications in line with international standards at more universities. Accordingly, IPO-Pakistan needs to outreach at schools, colleges, and universities, not just in the known established educational institutions but also across the entire country in places so far neglected. This must also be reinforced in centres of R&D, Chambers of Commerce, and other professional associations. IPO-Pakistan has been working for the effective administration of IPRs in the country and the promotion of IPR culture in Pakistan.

It has taken several initiatives to strengthen the IP ecosystem of Pakistan and much has been done. This includes the automation of IP registration processes, the establishment of the IP House, the enactment of GI law, the composition of the IP enforcement coordination system, the strengthening of IP Tribunals, and the holding of awareness sessions with stakeholders all over the country, yet much more remains to be done. To keep up the pace of development, IPO Pakistan has developed a roadmap to provide an equitable, smooth, and user-friendly IP System. With the strong emphasis on digitization in the reality of the post-COVID world, it is critical to bring the window of opportunity online to the established business community and critically to inventors and innovators sitting in the smallest village of Pakistan to help them transform their ideas into viable enterprises and patents so that they can harness the financial benefits. IP must be at the forefront of democratizing access for all citizens. Digitization opens doors for all citizens, irrespective of gender or location.

Far-flung areas must have immediate and equal access. No one should be left behind. IP complicated procedures and lengthy processes should be simplified when a streamlined online system is available as a user-friendly interface. To put Pakistan on the Intellectual Property map of the world as a compliant and responsible country is the only key to success. Integrating and upgrading IP infrastructure for improved service delivery, increased public awareness, and enhanced enforcement coordination for achieving the goal of being an IP and innovative-based Nation. Disruptive technologies are increasing disparities between and within societies and nations. Pakistan with its huge potential and abundant resources but with a growing population cannot grow and prosper. It must secure its place in the global economy. This can only be done with an enabling business environment, which thrives on research, innovation, entrepreneurial spirit, and opportunity creation, especially for the youth.

Advanced countries are racing away far toward innovative-based ever-improving technologies. The gap is increasing and Pakistani youth needs to be well-equipped with the latest tools in technology, especially in small towns and cities. Promotion of IPR awareness as well as education in the country to encourage research, innovation, creativity, commercialization of products and processes, and to encourage the use of the IP system at the gross root level is the need of the hour without wasting any further time. The future is all about a knowledge and innovative-based economy with the main focus on applied research at the universities and research institutes with patents at the postgraduate level without any further delay but with real dedication and commitment to institutional leadership. The government and institutes/universities’ leadership should focus on strengthening the intellectual property rights (IPR) regime of the country with clear and transparent policy, but with wisdom and vision.

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