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India IP Office Annual Report: A Tale of Transformation and Progress

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The Office of the Controller General of Patents, Designs, Trade Marks and Copyrights of India (IP Office) has recently released **its Annual Report** for the year 2016–17, which covers the period from April 1, 2016, to March 31, 2017 (the Year).

The highlights of the Annual Report (set out below) reflect the transformation the IP Office has undergone under the aegis of the Controller General, Om Prakash Gupta, who was appointed to the IP Office in November 2015.

The total number of trademark applications filed in the Year were 278,170, which showed a marginal dip compared to the previous year. However, the number of applications examined increased by 98.7 percent to 532,230 and the number of registrations granted showed a phenomenal increase of 284.5 percent, to 250,070 (up from 65,045 last year). Disposal of applications increased by 150 percent over the previous year. If numbers ever told a story, this year has been nothing short of a fairy tale.

Often, in a straightforward case, it is now possible to obtain a trademark registration within six months from the date of filing the application. The pendency of examination of applications has been reduced from 14 months to less than one month. Further, the rate of acceptance of trademark applications for publication has increased from less than 10 percent to about 40 percent.

Some other noteworthy changes for trademarks are as follows:

- Amendments to the Trademark Rules, which are primarily aimed at simplifying and expediting procedures: a few of the key amendments include service of documents through electronic communications, provision of hearings through video conferencing, discounts on electronic filing, specific provisions for sound marks, determination of marks as well-known, and expedited registrations.
- Increase in manpower: the Year saw 100 examiners joining the Trade Marks and Geographical Indications Office.
- Increase in transparency via digitization of records.

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- Controller General's timely engagements: stakeholders are invited to make suggestions on a periodic basis and discuss them by having meetings. A feedback mechanism has been set up on the IP Office website whereby stakeholders can provide their feedback and suggestions with respect to issues related to the functioning of the IP Office, complaints, and general queries.
- Several initiatives have been undertaken to upgrade the existing IT-enabled environment, computerized workflow, and internal IT system of the IP Office.
- Harmonization with various international offices: these include the European Union Intellectual Property Office, the United Kingdom Intellectual Property Office, and the Japan Patent Office. The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion also published a booklet on the Madrid Protocol, in collaboration with the EUIPO, recognizing the importance of the Madrid System in today's international IP landscape.
- The IP Office has also increased its social media presence by creating a Twitter account. An android mobile app has been launched through which one can not only ascertain the status of trademarks, but also obtain information about hearings, journals, manuals, guidelines, and other trademark tools.
- The IP Office, through the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Intellectual Property Management (RGNIIIPM), trains examiners and imparts awareness to the IP-user community. RGNIIIPM conducted 99 programs on IP rights training and awareness during the Year.

All in all, one can safely say that the above changes have been brought about as a result of the positive intentions of the government and solution-based decision-making by the Controller General. The results speak for themselves and give IP owners reason to hope that the IP Office will soon be one of the most efficient in the world.

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