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A TRIBUTE

TO SHRI P H KURIEN

EX- CONTROLLER GENERAL OF PATENTS (CGPDTM)



Mr P. H.Kurian (1959-2026)

CIPROM joins the intellectual property community in mourning the demise of Shri P. H. Kurien, former Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks, who passed away on 26th August 2026.

During his tenure as Controller General from 2009 to 2012, Shri Kurien brought about significant reforms in the Indian IP Office and left a lasting mark on India's intellectual property landscape. His contributions to transparency, administrative efficiency and patent jurisprudence, including the landmark decision granting

India's first post-TRIPS Compulsory Licence, continue to be deeply appreciated by the IP community.

As a mark of remembrance, we reproduce below an obituary written by **Mr. Praharsh Gour, Editor and Researcher at SpicyIP**, reflecting on Shri Kurien's life, his tenure at the Indian IP Office, and his enduring contributions to India's intellectual property system:

"It is with great sorrow that we share that the Indian IP fraternity lost one of its most remarkable administrators, Mr. P. H. Kurian, yesterday after a battle with cancer. A 1986-batch IAS officer, Mr. Kurian donned various hats throughout his illustrious career, as District Collector, Labour Commissioner, Managing Director of the Kerala State Industries Development Corporation (KSIDC), Principal Secretary to the Department of Industry, Kerala, Additional Chief Secretary to the Kerala Government, and Chairman of the Kerala Real Estate Regulatory Authority. But for many of us, he will perhaps be best remembered as one of the finest Controllers General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks India has had.

Prof. Basheer, with whom Mr. Kurian shared great camaraderie, described him as "a zealous controller general who

blazed the patent office with bold reforms..." And bold those reforms certainly were. Ranging from administrative tidying up to substantive contributions to Indian patent law jurisprudence, Mr. Kurian's tenure, which ran from 2009 to 2012, was nothing but the stuff of legends. Affectionately called "Bullet Kurian" by Prof. Basheer for his rapid and bold reform measures, Mr. Kurian, during his tenure as Controller General, oversaw a significant overhaul of the Patent Office, with transparency, accountability, and administrative efficiency becoming defining features of his stewardship.

As Prof. T.C. James, former Director (IPR), Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, who served in the Ministry during Mr. Kurian's tenure, recalls: "A fearless administrator with a humane touch, he championed the less privileged and never hesitated to do what was right—even when it meant taking decisions that displeased the powerful." That combination of administrative resolve and willingness to take difficult decisions was reflected across several of the reforms he introduced at the Patent Office.

Among his early measures was an attempt to improve the quality of patent examination by moving away from

arbitrary allocation of applications and organising examiners and controllers into subject-specific groups, supported by stricter use of the International Patent Classification and transfers intended to better match expertise with workload. He also pushed for greater professionalism among patent and trademark agents, sought additional expertise through deputations, and introduced measures aimed at curbing unauthorised access and potential conflicts within the Office.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Mr. Kurian's tenure, however, was his emphasis on opening the Patent Office to greater public scrutiny by digitizing the patent and trademark office records. His administration revived the requirement that correspondence between applicants and the Patent Office during prosecution be made available to the public, and routinely placed administrative orders online. Other measures during his tenure included requiring reasoned or "speaking" orders in pre-grant opposition matters, directing officials to disclose close relatives practising as IP lawyers or agents to avoid conflicts of interest, insisting upon compliance with Form 27 working requirements, and clarifying that the public could inspect amended specifications rather than merely the specifications originally filed.

On a call about Mr. Kurian, **Prashant Reddy T.** recalled that he was among those officers who actively pushed for greater transparency at the Patent Office, engaged constructively with stakeholders, and discharged his quasi-judicial functions with independence. He particularly highlighted initiatives such as the digitisation of records and the proactive publication of patent information, which helped set in motion a broader culture of openness within the Patent Office, one that today makes a remarkable amount of information publicly available, free of charge. Prashant also pointed me to letters written by Prof. Basheer, first to the PMO in 2007 and later to Mr. Kurian in 2009, setting out recommendations for making the Patent Office more transparent, many of which were subsequently taken up by the Office under Mr. Kurian's tenure.

This greater access to the Patent Office records did not merely improve institutional transparency, but it also made it possible for the blog and other commentators to scrutinise developments more closely, strengthening both reporting on and public discourse around the Indian patent law. And it would certainly not be controversial to say that Prof. Basheer and SpicyIP's calls for greater transparency were given a big boost when "Bullet

Kurian” came in with his rapid and bold reforms and changes. [For those interested in reading more about these reforms introduced by Mr. Kurian, readers can take a look at these posts by Prof. Basheer (here, here, and here), and by Prashant (here).]

Recalling the contributions of Mr. Kurian, **Sumathi Chandrashekar**, one of our former managing editors, said that “... Mr Kurian transformed the way the IP offices worked in India, and cleaned up a lot of administrative matters. Digitisation changed with him..., as also pendency, and a boatload of new recruits were added too. A lot of what SpicyIP was able to report on from his tenure onwards was arguably because of the improved transparency he had brought in. Being from the IAS, he also brought the sensibility of an administrator familiar with that kind of ‘scale’ to the institution. Arguably, also, the improvements of the past 10-15 years are a continuation of what he started, and India would not have had an IP office of any significance without his contributions.”

On his contributions towards the development of Indian patent law jurisprudence, Mr. Kurian is perhaps known for granting India’s first (post-

TRIPS) compulsory license. The licence was issued to Natco for manufacturing Nexavar, a kidney and liver cancer drug sold under the generic name Sorafenib Tosylate. The order fixed the price of the generic alternative at Rs 8,800 for a monthly dose (120 tablets), significantly improving its affordability for patients across the country. The order was appealed before the IPAB, where it was upheld by Justice Prabha Sridevan. Recalling both the significance of that order and the judicial quality of Mr. Kurian’s reasoning, Justice Sridevan, former Judge, Madras High Court, and former Chairperson, IPAB, shared the following:

“Some posts and positions strike the public eye because of the one who presently occupies it. The world realised that there was a CGPDTM only when Mr. Kurian occupied it. His CL order resounded across the world.

My one argument against moving subjects from Courts to Tribunals is that a judicial temperament is needed. It is true that Mr. Kurian was not a Tribunal, but he showed what judicial reasoning is, and how an order should be written. And one after my own heart, it advanced access to health while staying within the lines drawn by The Patents Act.

His passing will be mourned by the IP world.”

Dr. Zakir Thomas, DPIIT IPR Chair Professor at NLSIU Bengaluru and former Registrar of Copyrights, similarly recalled how the compulsory licence order came to define Mr. Kurian’s place in Indian patent jurisprudence:

“There have been Controller Generals of Patents, Designs and Trademark before Mr P H Kurian and after Mr Kurian. Mr Kurian stands out as someone whom the IP world remembers. His passing is noted, reported in major dailies, and mourned more than that of an ordinary IAS officer. That is because of the significant impact that he had on Indian patent jurisprudence. His decision to issue a compulsory license in March 2012, India’s first compulsory license ever, was noted the world over. Bayer took the matter in appeal, but Kurian’s order withstood the tough judicial scrutiny. Cancer patients who could afford Sorafenib, whose lives he saved, are grateful for his actions as a bureaucrat. It is sad that he succumbed to Cancer, which too pancreatic cancer, thought of as undruggable till yesterday, when the FDA approved daraxonrasib for pancreatic cancer—delivering a new treatment option to patients with advanced pancreatic cancer. Let us hope that this drug will be

accessible and affordable to the patients in India and around the world.”

As the Indian IP community mourns this profound loss, we extend our deepest condolences to his family and loved ones and hope they find strength in this difficult time. May his legacy continue to inspire generations of lawyers, scholars, and administrators, and may he rest in power.”

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Tributes from the IP Fraternity

Prof. Dr. Unnat P. Pandit, Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks and Registrar of Copyrights & Geographical Indications, shared the following condolence message for Shri P. H. Kurien in a LinkedIn post:

“It is with profound sorrow that we learned of the demise of Sh. P.H. Kurian, former CGPDTM and retired IAS officer, who also served as Additional Chief Secretary in the Government of Kerala.

His passing is a profound loss to all who knew him and benefited from his guidance, especially to the Intellectual Property Office, where he left a lasting legacy of reforms in India’s IP systems.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, colleagues, and all who held him in

high regard. May his family find strength and courage in this difficult time.

Sir, personally I will miss you as your guidance has helped me a lot to learn and understand issues / challenges of IP Office....!

Rest in peace.

Om Shanti.

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Mr. Sunil Jose, Professor of Practice at Alliance University and Founder of Suns Legal, shared the following tribute to Shri P. H. Kurien in a LinkedIn post:

“The Indian IP fraternity has lost its T.N. Seshan.

P.H. Kurian Sir is no more.

While the newer generation of practitioners might not immediately recognize his name, they certainly know his legacy. He was the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks (CGPDTM) from 2009 to 2012.

His decision to grant India’s first compulsory license under Section 84 of India’s Patent Act sent shockwaves through the IP world. For the first time, the IP Office utilized the compulsory licensing provision and granted it to the Indian company, Natco Pharma, for producing

Bayer’s patented cancer drug. This enabled Natco Pharma to offer a monthly dose for just ₹8,800, while Bayer was offering the same medicine for ₹2.8 lakh.

Bayer v. Natco Pharma is a landmark case which all IP students mandatorily study in patent classes across India. This is one of the few cases we tell the next generation to substantiate the balance between private rights and public interest in the patent regime, because we simply don’t have many such cases. Yet, students may not know much about the person behind the decision to grant this compulsory license.

Post his CG role, I had an opportunity to meet him at a private function in Kerala and heard the first-hand experience about this case directly from him. It is a conversation I will always remember.

Rest In Peace, Sir!”

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Dr. G. R. Raghavender shared the following tribute to Shri P. H. Kurian in a Facebook post:

In Memoriam

Deeply saddened by the passing of Mr. P. H. Kurian, IAS, noted bureaucrat and former Controller General of Patents, Designs & Trade Marks (CGPDTM).

He will be remembered for his landmark 2012 decision granting a compulsory licence to Natco Pharma for Bayer's cancer drug Nexavar, a defining moment in India's pharmaceutical patent jurisprudence and access-to-medicines policy.

His contribution to India's IP landscape will be long remembered.

Om Shanti.

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NATCO Pharma shared the following tribute to Shri P. H. Kurien in a LinkedIn post:

"A tribute to Shri P. H. Kurien, a public servant whose landmark decision put public health before patent rights.

In 2012, as India's Patent Controller, Mr. Kurien made history by granting India's first compulsory licence, enabling NATCO to produce an affordable generic version of Bayer's cancer drug Nexavar. His landmark decision brought the monthly treatment cost down from over ₹2.8 lakhs to ₹8,800, making a lifesaving medicine accessible to thousands of needy patients.

His courage, integrity, and commitment to public health continue to stand as a powerful testament that patent law must serve people, not just profits.

A legacy of courage, compassion, and

standing up for the people."

Shri P. H. Kurien's contribution to India's intellectual property system extends beyond the decisions and reforms of his tenure. His work reflected the importance of an IP system that is transparent, accountable and responsive to the public interest.

For those who worked with him, learned from him, or encountered the impact of his work, his legacy will remain a part of the continuing story of India's intellectual property system.



CIPROM offers its sincere condolences to Shri P. H. Kurien's family, colleagues, friends and the many members of the IP fraternity who mourn his untimely demise. May his memory continue to inspire those who strive to build an IP system that serves both innovation and the community.

May his soul rest in peace. Om Shanti.

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