

“Nepali drugs are now of international quality.”



MIN BAJRACHARYA

As one of Nepal's leading drug companies, Deurali-Janta Pharmaceuticals strives for self-sufficiency in medicines of international quality. Its founder and executive director Hari Bhakta Sharma tells *Nepali Times* he wants to get into the export market.

***Nepali Times:* Is the problem of substandard drugs in Nepal getting better?**

Hari Bhakta Sharma: The problem is our inefficient regulatory bodies. There is limited technical knowhow and intervention for quality control. There is only one government lab and it can analyse just 1,000 samples per year. That is possible only if the chemicals and manpower are available. According to government statistics, there are 12,000 brands available in the country every year. Medicines are supplied outside Kathmandu but there isn't the infrastructure to monitor the medicines supplied in places like Ilam and Dadeldhura.

Nepali pharmaceutical companies have a small share of even the domestic market.

If we want to go to India or other South Asian countries, we will be subject to high tariffs and other difficult barriers. Reciprocal restrictions should apply to foreign companies that come here. Unfortunately, the government favours import of medicines to local manufacturing. I haven't seen such policies in other countries.

How do you change that?

We have been unable to explain clearly the importance of the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors to the government. People involved in policy making have to understand the business paradigm: the type of technology, policies and facilities that are needed. Even when we are successful in educating one official, by the time he grasps the idea, he gets transferred to another department.

Our policies are the same as they were 20 years ago. If you look at the pharmaceutical sector in other places, there have been tremendous and rapid changes

What are the other constraints?

Suppose we need to get new equipments—there are heavy tariff barriers. In terms of capital, the cost of maintaining the quality is three times expensive than manufacturing. Our overall investment in terms of fixed capital has gone up. In spite of all this, we have been able to do what is possible in this country. We have integrated and upgraded our technology. It gives me pride to say that our company is not too far behind in terms of drug technology than those in America or Europe or India. That is a major achievement. This is proven by the WHO certification of CGMP (current good manufacturing practices) granted to us.

How will you get Nepalis to trust Nepali products?

By delivering quality. The response to our products is very encouraging. The best thing about our company is that we have the capacity to make quality assurance with scientific proof. You can't fool the doctors with just talk. The most important issue is that the product has to cure the ailment that it has been prescribed for.

It is said prevention is better than cure, and most ailments in Nepal need prevention.

It is better for the nation if we focus on prevention. We are also developing health promotion drugs for better and healthier living. But looking at today's lifestyle, economic conditions, living conditions and socio-economic situation, we need to be prepared with proper medications as well. Today's lifestyles are stressful and these lead to premature ageing—we plan to get into rejuvenation drugs and promote them in the international market. This is not easy but we have the confidence that we can be successful and have already applied in selected markets in developed countries.