

RAJYA SABHA

Monday, the 3rd August, 1987/12 Srawana,
1909 (Saka).

The House met at eleven of the clock,
The Deputy Chairman in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Shortage of Vital Drugs in the Capital

@*101. SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH
MALIK:†

SHRI SANTOSH
BAGRODIA:

Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be
pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government's attention has been drawn to the news items which appeared in "The Times of India" dated the June 25, 1987 wherein it has been stated that there is an acute shortage of vital drugs in the capital;

(b) if so, what are the reasons therefor;

(c) whether any measures are being contemplated to make these vital drugs available in the capital; and

(d) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CHEMICALS AND PETRO-CHEMICALS IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes, Madam. M/s. FDC Pvt. Ltd. the producer of Pilocar 2 per cent have informed temporary shortfall in production of this drug due to scarcity of the bulk drug i.e. Pilocarpine Nitrate required in the manufacture of the formulation, in the international market.

(c) and (d) The company has recently rushed 6,000 vials to Delhi. The availability position of the bulk drug is improving and adequate stocks of the formulation are being rushed to Delhi.

@Previously Starred Question 51 transferred from the 29th July, 1987.

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Mukhtiar Singh Malik.

SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK:
Madam Deputy Chairman, the hon. Minister has spoken about the shortage of only one vital drug in the capital. There have been consistent reports from places throughout the country. There have been some reports from Bombay that there is shortage of some essential drugs in the Bombay city. There have been reports about Madras itself. Then again there have been reports about the shortage of essential drugs in Amritsar. Now it is in the capital. However, Madam, I would like to say that this drug industry shall have to intensify its efforts for reaching the goal of health for all which is one of the objectives the new, revised 20-Point Programme. Madam, it is very unfortunate that the drug industry has failed to achieve this cherished goal. However, I would like to bring it to the notice of the Government that the producers of vital drugs have been waiting very eagerly for the finalisation of the price control order.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please formulate your question. Two minutes have gone.

SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK:
I am coming to the question, "Madam. As such, the trouble is, the Government has taken a very long time for formulation of this price control order. May I ask the hon. Minister whether this inordinate delay in the formulation of the price control order is not the sole cause of the shortage or the non-availability of essential drugs in the country?"

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH:
Madam, if I may venture, this question relates to a news item which was carried in some of the newspapers.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: The "Times of India."

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH:
... June, the 24th in which it has been reported that there are certain vital drugs which are in acute shortage, of which Piloca-2 per cent is one. This is an item, this is a drug which is used in the treatment of glaucoma.

There are three formulations which are produced from this: Pilocar 1 per cent. Pilocar 2 per cent and Pilocar 4 per cent vials. And the raw material, the main bulk drug for this comes from Brazil. During the last two or three years in Brazil there has been an inclement weather, and the production of this particular bulk drug in that country has gone down considerably. As a result, the availability in our country has been affected.

We have taken various steps to rectify this, to supplement this, and we have recently asked the company which is producing it to import more of this from Brazil and other countries which are producing it. In Delhi, as per the reports I have, some time in July, there is no shortage of this particular drug. Also, besides this, there are other therapeutic drugs available. There are five companies which are producing this drug—Pilocar 2 per cent—but there are other therapeutic drugs also available in case of emergency. This is a particular brand name.

The question which my friend has raised is about DPCO and it does not really relate to this question Madam. I can assure you that we are working on this and are in final stages. New DPCO hopefully will come sometime this month.

SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK: The reply of the hon. Minister is very evasive. My question is about the non-availability of vital drugs and not about a particular drug's non-availability. It is about non-availability of vital and essential drugs. However, as the hon. Minister has said and as the Government claims that the drug production has been increasing in the country, I may point out that this observation is based on the outlook of the industry as a whole.

I would like to ask the hon. Minister again about the non-availability of vital and essential drugs. The question relates to drugs in plural sense. I was speaking about Bombay, Madras and Amritsar. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether it is not a fact that the production of essential drugs has suffered as the industry has tended to concentrate on the output of non-essential drugs where the

cost-price relationship has been favourable to them.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Yes, please.

SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK: Madam, I am asking question. Why do you.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No. But you have to frame your question within two minutes.

SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK: Yes, I am putting my question within two minutes.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Your two minutes are over.

SHRI MUKHTIAR SINGH MALIK: Further, I would like to ask, whether it is also not a fact that pharmaceutical companies faced with heavy losses in the manufacture of essential drugs have been shifting their interests greatly to the non-essential sector or are diversifying in other fields of drugs leading to non-availability of essential drugs in the country.

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH: I will try to answer some of the points raised by the hon. Member. There is no general shortage of drugs in the country as such. I will be happy to inform the hon. Member through you about the general approach which the Department or the Health Ministry has in monitoring the shortage of drugs in different parts of the country. As and when reports from the Drug Controller or reports appearing in newspapers or emanating from any source about the shortages occur or come to our notice, we immediately notify to the particular producer or the concerned producers about that particular drug. I have just one example that as on 19-5-1987 the IDPL in Cuttack had said that there was certain non-availability of antibiotic Strepto-Penicillin injections. The step that we took on 19-5-1987 was that we had asked the particular company concerned about the position of drugs in that area and also in other areas to let us know about

the production capacity and the availability and non-availability. Immediately thereon, the company or the companies concerned acted and we have got an information as of Strepto-penicillin injections that they had despatched 75,000 vials of Strepto-penicillin to Cuttack on 8-5-1987. Now, such reports are gathered and we keep it. We monitor this in our Ministry. So, there is no actual shortage of drugs. Shortage may be of a particular brand name drug, but their substitutes with other brand names are always available.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Madam, some drugs, namely, Analgin, Baralgin, Intestopan etc., are banned in developed countries. But they are freely available in our country. I understand that these drugs are very harmful. May I know from the Minister whether the Government is thinking about banning all these kinds of drugs which are considered harmful?

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH: Madam. I would surely need a separate notice for this. However, I can answer this point. There are drugs which are banned in the U.S. but not banned in U.K. Some of the drugs are banned in U. K. but not in European countries. Some of the drugs are banned in the Western world but not banned in our country which have a tropical climate. This is a subject which pertains to the Health Ministry. They are monitoring this. They have set up a committee to look into this matter. The drugs which are banned by the Drug Controller of India are not definitely introduced in our country.

SHRI RAOOF VALIULLAH: Madam, whenever there is a shortage of vital drugs, spurious drugs enter the market. May I know from the Minister whether due to non-availability of vital drugs in the capital and also because of spurious drugs entering the market any loss of life has been reported?

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH: No. Not to the Ministry.

SHRI M. KADHARSHA: Madam, Glaucoma is an eye disease. If it is not treated in time it will result in total blindness and Pilocar eye drops is the only

medicine for it. The hon. Minister says that there is an alternative to this. But when a particular physician prescribes a particular medicine, the patient will go for the particular brand of medicine.

Secondly, the Government policy not only is un-justified to the National Health Programme but to the 20-Point Programme of the late Prime Minister also. The 8-Point Programme of the 20-Point Programme envisages the eradication of total blindness and leprosy. The Pilocar eye drops has been under price control. But the Government itself has allowed a price increase from Rs. 3.40 to Rs. 4.65 per vial. In spite of that, this vital drug is being sold for anything between Rs. 10 to Rs. 15 per vial. May I know from the Minister, why the Government has not taken any action against the blackmarketeers?

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH: Madam: the price has been increased at the instance of the Government. The Government had revised the price because Pilocar 2 per cent is being sold at Rs. 10.60 paise. It is true the newspapers have reported that the prices have gone up. As I have said earlier, it is due to non-availability of this drug. In Brazil, the Pilocarpus Micropiliosus is the particular herb which is being cultivated and because of the inclement weather there during the last two or three years, the non-availability at the international market has been a matter of great concern to us. Madam, recently we have taken steps by having our own people to look into this so that this plant can be grown in our part of the country. In this connection we have been in touch with Dr. Kokati, Professor and Dean of the Kakatiya University, Andhra Pradesh for possible growth of this plant by the latest technique tissue culture method. They have already taken up research project on this subject matter. Regarding the price rise, the Government has allowed it because of the non-availability of the plant and the rise in the price of the international market.

SHRI M. VINCENT: Madam, may I know from the Minister whether the Government is aware that the anti-polio drops for immunisation against polio are in acute shortage in many parts of the

country? How are we going to solve this problem? As a permanent solution, may I know from the Minister whether the Government would manufacture anti-polio drops in India?

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH: This does not relate to the question at all.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: It does not arise out of it.

SHRI LAKSHMI KANT JHA: Madam, may I submit that the crux of the question as put originally and in supplementaries is a broader one than of the availability of individual drugs named in the answer to the question. The thrust of the question is whether the policy of focusing on price and restraining it from going up in the case of essential drugs is, in fact, resulting in shortages. Now, it is no answer to that to say that there is a shortage of one brand but other brands are available. Can we assure the public, the patients and the doctors that the substitute is as effective and does not suffer from quality weaknesses because human life is at stake? Will Government consider how the change of emphasis from controlling the price of cement to augmenting its availability killed the black market and led to a fall in the open market price? There are other examples also. Will Government not think of the pricing in terms of its role in improving the availability, which is much more important when a man is dying?

SHRI R. K. JAICHANDRA SINGH: Madam, I can only repeat what I have said that efforts are being made to produce more in the country and I have just enumerated to a question raised by an hon. Member from the other side. We have a number of alternatives available. Whether those alternatives are efficacious or effective is a subject matter which the doctors will have to deal with and I am not a doctor.

*102. [The questioner (Shri Parvathaneni Upendra) was absent. For answer, vide Col. 33 infra]

Profitability study of Drug Companies

*103. **SHRI BHUBANESWAR**

KALITA:

SHRI RAJNI RANJAN SAHU:

Will the Minister of **INDUSTRY** be pleased to state:

(a) what steps have been taken by Government in the light of the observations of the Supreme Court that profiteering in life saving drugs is diabolic and a menace which has to be fettered and curbed;

(b) whether Government have made any profitability study of drug companies during the last three years;

(c) if so, what are the details and results thereof indicating the number of the instances of over-charging of prices that have come to Government's notices and the action taken in each case under the Essential Commodities Act or otherwise;

(d) what is the estimated amount of overcharge or unintended profits made by the drug industry since 1980; and

(e) how much of such profits have been collected till now and what are the reasons for non-collection of the balance amount?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI J. VENGAL RAO): (a) to (e) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Action on various directions of the Supreme Court has been taken by the Government.

(b) The companies are required to submit information regarding profitability in Form-6 prescribed in the DPCO. Profitability studies have been made in case of complaints in respect of M/s. Warner Hindustan, M/s. Richardson Hindustan and M/s. Infar (India) during the last three years.

(c) Action has been taken for adjusting the formulation prices wherever found necessary.

†The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Rajni Ranjan Sahu.