

SHRI CHITTA BASU (Barasat) : He says that this particular subject is under the process of consideration. The Chairmen of the IRBI and the Export-Import Bank of India have already given their views. The Members are in the process of hearing them. The matter has not yet been finally concluded...*(Interruptions)* Therefore, my request is that since it is in the process of discussion, I think the report should come to the House. Only on the basis of that report, the discussion should take place.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : After the Question Hour, I will decide about this. Sit down now, please.

[Translation]

PROF. RASA SINGH RAWAT : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, Please allow me to speak for just one minute.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : It is already over. This matter will be decided after Question Hour.

SHRI MUKHTAR ANIS (Sitapur) : Sir, the time is being wasted. A decision about this matter should be taken after Question Hour.

11.08 hrs.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[English]

Wage Ceiling for Employees State Insurance Scheme

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*81. SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN :
DR. KRUPASINDHU BHOI :

Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government have decided to increase the wage ceiling from Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 65000/- for inclusion in the ESI Scheme;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the workers' unions or experts have also been consulted before taking such a decision;

(d) if not, the reasons therefor;

(e) the number of additional workers likely to be included in the scheme vis-a-vis the existing number, State/UT-wise;

(f) the existing medical facilities being provided under the scheme and additional facilities proposed to be provided corresponding to the increase in the number of workers under the scheme; and

(g) the measures being taken by the Government to improve the conditions in the existing ESI dispensaries/hospitals?

THE MINISTER OF WELFARE (BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA) : (a) to (g) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

The Labour Minister's Conference of major States in a meeting held on 4.10.1996 recommended enhancement of the wage ceiling for coverage under the ESI Scheme from Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 6500/- per month. The ESI Corporation which is a tripartite body comprising inter-alia experts from medical profession and 10 representatives of Central Trade Union Organisations also considered and recommended the proposal in the meeting held on 5.10.96. The Central Government accepted the recommendation and enhanced the wage ceiling under the ESI Scheme from Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 6500/- per month with effect from 1.1.97.

The information about the existing number of insured persons covered under the ESI Scheme and number of additional employees to be covered is as given in *Annexure*. The ESI Corporation has set up 124 hospitals, 42 Annexes and 1440 dispensaries for providing medical care to the ESI beneficiaries throughout the country. The facilities provided in these hospitals/dispensaries are considered adequate to take care of additional employees as majority of these employees were earlier beneficiaries of the ESI Scheme but had gone out of its coverage because of gradual increase in their wages.

Except in Delhi and NOIDA, the responsibility for Administration of medical care under the ESI Act rests in State Governments/Union Territory Administration. The ESI Corporation has prescribed norms for providing adequate medicines, equipments, staff etc, in the ESI hospitals/dispensaries. The expenditure on medical care is shared between the ESIC and State Government in the agreed ratio of 7:1. The expenses on building of hospitals and purchase of costly equipments are met entirely by the ESI Corporation.

In order to improve the quality of ESI medical care the ESI Corporation has decided to enhance the ceiling on expenditure on medical care from Rs. 410/- to Rs. 500/- per Insured Person per annum with effect from 1.4.97. The Corporation has recently launched an extensive programme for upgradation of hospital facilities by providing latest modern equipments in the ESI Hospitals. For proper diagnosis and care of occupational diseases the Corporation has also set up 4 Occupational Diseases Centres i.e. one each at Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras at its cost. In order to ensure that the insured persons do get proper medical care the corporation has set up a General purposes Sub-committee which visits ESI Hospitals and dispensaries in 2 or 3 States each year. The deficiencies pointed out by the Committee are brought to the notice of the concerned State Government for taking suitable remedial action.

Annexure

Details of existing and expected additional coverage on account of enhancement of wage limit under the ESI Scheme, State-wise.

S.No.	Name of State/U.T.	Existing coverage	Expected additional coverage.
1.	Andhra Pradesh	3,57,500	50,000
2.	Assam	40,850	3,000
3.	Bihar	1,28,500	15,000
4.	Chandigarh	24,150	2,000
5.	Delhi	3,18,900	45,000
6.	Goa	36,050	5,000
7.	Gujarat	5,48,500	80,000
8.	Haryana	2,86,000	36,000
9.	H.P.	29,450	2,000
10.	J & K	11,900	9,000
11.	Karnataka	5,01,850	75,000
12.	Kerala & Mahe	3,86,400	50,000
13.	M.P.	1,77,400	25,000
14.	Maharashtra	10,74,700	2,00,000
15.	Orissa	1,18,200	15,000
16.	Pondicherry	18,900	1,000
17.	Punjab	3,65,850	45,000
18.	Rajasthan	2,34,100	35,000
19.	Tamil Nadu	8,18,500	1,15,000
20.	U.P.	4,04,400	50,000
21.	West Bengal	7,31,300	1,10,000
		66,13,400	9,60,000

SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, first of all, I do not know why the Labour Minister is absent. It is a very vital question for which answer from the Labour Minister is quite essential. Anyhow, I put the question.

The condition of the ESI hospitals and dispensaries is very deplorable. The doctors and the staff serving in these institutions do not have any accountability to anybody. The ESI Scheme is operated under the provisions of a Central Act. Neither the Corporation nor the State Governments do supervise these hospitals. If there is a hell on earth, this is the place where you can see it. Such a deplorable position is prevailing in the hospitals and dispensaries. The standard of medicines is very low. The service of doctors and staff is irresponsible and the workers are not benefited from this Scheme. Will the Government bring in some provision to have a supervisory control over the Corporation when running these hospitals and dispensaries?

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : But I think the coverage is about 33 per cent...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : I do not agree with - I do not say it is an allegation - his complain that the hospitals or medical centres are not working well. I have the report. I am satisfied that the medical centres and hospitals are functioning well. But there can be some complaints or some isolated case...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Let him reply first.

SHRI RAMENDRA KUMAR : He has no experience about the functioning of the hospitals...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : Let me reply first. For instance, we have a provision of 23,47 beds. We are in a position that we can accommodate ten lakh more people if they come under this Scheme. The hon. Member wanted to know whether there some supervisory staff. We have a Joint Inspectic Medical Commission. The State Governments are the appropriate Governments to implement all the requirements of the ESI. So, in my opinion, I have to tell the House that there is no such discrepancy or weakness or lack of responsibility. Everything is working well.

SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN : I request the hon. Minister to visit some of the hospitals some time.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : Okay.

SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN : My second Supplementary is, there are sick units...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : Just a minute I am not asking any question. My submission is that this matter about the conditions of the ESI hospitals, such a serious matter that it should be answered by the Labour Minister. I suggest, therefore, that a fuller time discussion either in the form of Half-an-Hour Discussion or in any other manner, be held when the Labour Minister is present. That is my submission.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Let him first speak.

(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Gentleman, let him answer the second Supplementary.

SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN : There are some sick units both in the private sector and in the public sector. Those sick units are not in a position to comply with the strict provisions of the ESI scheme. There are also some units which provide better facilities to the workers than their employees than provided under the ESI scheme. On these two counts, would the Government bring some provisions to exempt these units from the purview of the ESI scheme?

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : The Government has always been very serious. We want to accommodate more and more employees under the ESI scheme. That is why, we raised the salary limit from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 6,500.

Regarding sick units, if some matter is brought to my notice, I will certainly examine that or my colleague or the Government will examine that.

The other query raised by my hon. friend is about the prevalence of some other schemes in some organisations. The Government has gone thoroughly into the various other alternative schemes of other organisations. After thorough examination, we have found that they are not comparable to our Scheme. If the hon. Member has some scheme in his mind, I am also open about that and we can also discuss those schemes.

SHRI MADHUKAR SARPOTDAR : Respected Deputy-Speaker, Sir, while giving the answer to the particular question about the ESI scheme, the concerned Minister has replied saying that in order to improve the quality of ESI medical care, the ESI Corporation has decided to enhance the ceiling on expenditure on medical care from Rs. 410 to Rs. 500. My simple question is : What is the present price structure of all these medicines? If a person goes to a doctor and if he only gets the prescription after having himself medically examined, in that case, he is charged Rs. 100. If you visit and see the condition of the ESI hospitals in Maharashtra, you will find that it is very horrible. Workers do not get any facility at all. They go there only to obtain a certificate to remain absent from the factories. Beyond that there is no other medical facility provided to the workmen. Under such circumstances, eventually, after the discussions with trade unions about the various settlements, they have made provision for the medical facilities to the workmen. In view of the fact that those settlements and agreements are prevailing, the enhancement limit is unnecessary and it will not help the working class at all. Before taking this decision, the Minister should have discussion with the Central Trade Union and also with other members. My question is, whether the concerned Minister has visited any hospital of the ESIC. Then only they have to decide about the enhancement.

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE : As also about the strengthening of the peripheral services.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : Sir, the hon. Member's objection is that the Scheme was enhanced, which was not required. May I request, through you, to the House that let us see to it. Suppose, somebody was drawing Rs. 3,000 on 31st December, a cut-off date, he gets Rs. 3,100...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN : The Question is about medical facilities and not about the Scheme.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : He has mentioned to that also. Let me make it clear. After all, you are our hon. colleagues. Listen to me, please.

Suppose, he gets Rs. 100 more, then he goes out of the cover which is available for medical facilities.

That is why, after having constant discussion with the trade unions to ensure that viable and sustainable medical facilities are available and workers are not excluded, we have enhanced the amount.

Regarding the point of visiting certain hospitals before doing that, I would submit that we have certainly visited some hospitals and had discussions with the trade unions. Then only we have decided to enhance the *per capita* availability of funds from Rs. 410 to Rs. 500.

Sir, through you, I want to inform the hon. Members...

SHRI MADHUKAR SARPOTDAR : If they are functioning better then he should mention the names of the hospitals he has visited.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : Sir, please give me the opportunity to speak.

There is no cap, and I repeat that there is no cap on the amount of expenditure incurred on the treatment of an insured person or any member of his family. We are also making super facilities available to many employees. If they are chronically ill, we have also indicated some hospitals, and they will be given better treatment. For this we may have to spend even Rs. 10 lakh; what to speak of Rs. 500.

SHRI MADHUKAR SARPOTDAR : They are not having culture in the hospitals for years together. Has anybody examined it? What kind of a treatment the workmen are getting, are you aware of it?

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : Yes, Sir. During the last three months, the Secretary, Labour and the Director-General, ESI have visited various States. They had discussions with those States. So, after having deep and thorough discussions, we have come to this conclusion.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the building of the ESI hospital at Durgapur had been completed two years back but the hospital has not yet started functioning.

May I know from the hon. Minister that when will that ESI hospital at Durgapur the building of which has already been completed, start functioning? Also may I know how many non-functional ESI hospitals are there in the State of West Bengal?

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : Sir, the delay in the completion of the building was the reason that we could not start it. The moment we get the certificate that the building is okay, we will start it functioning.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : The building is okay. Two years back, it was completed. Now, you are to start it functioning.

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : I will look into it.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Okay. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

SHRI RAM NAIK : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to whether he feels that ESI is functioning efficiently and no other organisation can serve better than it. Would you go in for sample survey and know the reaction of the workers there to? Would you tell the names of trade unions which have given their consent for extending the time limit?

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : As the issue of hon'ble member has mentioned the extension of ESI Scheme and inclusion of more people in it has been decided after conducting survey. Opinion of almost all the trade Unions have been sought. The Hon'ble member may tell me about the trade unions which were not consulted on this issue...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI RAM NAIK : Whether the trade unions which were consulted on this issue, have given their consent. If so, which are those trade unions?

SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA : All the trade unions included in the Consultative Advisory Board of ESI have been consulted on it. Please tell me about trade unions which have been left out. We will seek their opinion in the matter.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : It is an important question. Unfortunately the Labour Minister is also not present here and many hon'ble Members want to know about it. It will be better if this is taken up during Half-an-Hour discussion.

[English]

SHRI PRADIP BHATTACHARYA : You are perfectly correct. It requires Half-an-Hour discussion. But the most important thing I would like to place before you is, so many trade unions...

[Translation]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : You can speak on this issue during Half-an-Hour discussion.

[English]

We have already agreed for Half-an-Hour discussion on this question. So, please do not mention it now.

Crisis in SAIL Units

*82. SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) as a whole or any of its units are facing threat or crisis as a result of high competition and economic liberalisation;

(b) if so, the details thereof, unit-wise; and

(c) the remedial measures proposed to be taken by the Government to overcome the problem?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA) : (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise in view of (a) above.

There is no threat or crisis in the Steel Authority of India.

SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI : I am surprised to see how this very new and dynamic Minister is provoked to be misled by his officers to suppress the truth before the nation. I do not mind it because it is his job to give reply. The time has come when the entire nation will judge whether this reply is correct or incorrect. I do not like to embarrass the officials of the SAIL with respect to what they deposed before various fora of Parliament, but I would like to remind him only one thing.

The Nitish Sengupta Committee which was set up to examine and go into the entire details...

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Munshiji, question please.

SHRI P.R. DASMUNSI : I am coming to the question, Sir.

[Translation]

He has denied it flatly. But I would like to say that we have to bring out truth if he does not accept it.

[English]

I quote the Nitish Sengupta Committee's observation :

"In a free trade regime with import duties falling everywhere, Indian steel plants are in danger of being overwhelmed in the domestic market by the global majority and cannot also gain easy access to other markets unless their ware is the best priced and also carries the tag of good, not just passable quality".

I would like to know from the hon. Minister where it is a fact that the falling import duty of steel day in day out provided India as a dumping ground and that dumping ground in India is being allowed in the interest of foreign countries at the cost of our own domestic production. Why I am saying this is because the same Minister replied in the other House to Shrimati Jayanthi Natarajan that Indian steel plants are having the capacity to meet the domestic requirements fully and there is no question of any crisis in the plants. If the domestic requirement can be met fully and at the same time at a lesser price the dumping of the imported steel goes on with the falling of the imported steel, how will you justify the viability of the steel plants in India in future?