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Title: Regarding huge price difference in critical life saving drugs of various brands of same medicines sold in the country.

SHRI P.K. BIJU (ALATHUR): Madam Speaker, I would like to draw your attention and the attention of the House to the huge price difference in crucial life saving drugs for cancer which is a major concern in the health sector. The first ever study conducted by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) on cancer medicines has found huge price variations among different brands of same medicines sold in the country. While Novartis, Pfizer and Eli Lilly were some of the foreign multinational companies whose products were included in the analysis, their Indian counter parts were Dr. Reddys, Sun, Cadila, Hetero, Glenmark and Natco among others.

The price difference is the highest – 3,210 per cent – among the different brands of breast cancer medicine Letrozole. While a ten-tablet strip of Letrozole of 2.5 mg. from Swiss drug-maker Novartis costs Rs. 1,986, the same strip by Hyderabad-based Hetero carries a price tag of Rs. 60.

The pattern is visible in all the five or six types of cancer drugs where the price difference is over 1,000 per cent, as imported medicines are always the most expensive while a domestic maker sells the cheapest version. Of the 75 medicines that were subjected to analysis, the price difference of over 100 per cent was seen in 30 cases. There were several instances where both the highest and the lowest prices were offered by domestic companies.

The fifteen-year-old Drug Price Control Order, the DPCO, notified under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955, that governs the NPPA, does not list anti-cancer medication among the medicines whose prices need to be fixed. Invoking the "public interest" clause in DPCO may also be difficult as anti-cancer medication often escapes the turnover and the monopoly criteria needed to bring drugs under direct price control.

It results in near non-accessibility of medicines to a vast majority of the affected population because of the high cost. I am wondering why the Government has not taken any stringent measures to regulate anti-cancer medication within the existing rules. If there is a strong case in favour of price control, what are the steps taken hitherto by the Government?

I strongly urge the Government to implement strict regulations to bring the prices down in order to help the hapless cancer patients in our country.