

that is why the trains are late. May I know whether the hon. Minister is taking any steps to change the old engines and replace them by new ones?

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: There is a plan to replace the old steam engines and that plan is under implementation.

[*Translation*]

SHRI RAGHAVJI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the Central Railway there are some trains which always run behind scheduled round the year. I would like to know whether the hon. Minister proposes to get all the factors responsible for the late running of trains analysed and effect a change in the time table to ensure the adherence of their schedule or analyse and remove such factors.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: We will implement the suggestion given by the hon. Member.

[*English*]

DR. A.K. PATEL: This pertains to my constituency. Over and above the irregularity of the trains there are various other problems also there. At present one agitation is going on in my constituency, Mehsana on the 10th of August, and about 10,000 people are going to take part in a rail *roko* agitation. The problem is that these old railway lines were laid some fifty years back; the entry to the city is too small and the people have to wait for two to three hours to enter the city. We have been asking the Railways to widen the track. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether they will construct the over bridge or widen the track at the cost of Railways.

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: It does not relate to this question. However, I would like to tell the hon. Member that that action will further hurt the punctuality schedule of the trains.

Availability of Essential Drugs

*3. **SHRIMATI SUBHASHINI ALI:** Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND CHEMICALS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any new initiatives have been taken by Government to ensure availability of low cost essential drugs to the consumers;

(b) if so, the details thereof and the outcome thereof; and

(c) what steps have been taken to break the nexus between the MNCs and large scale drug manufacturing companies to the detriment of the consumers?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND CHEMICALS (SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY): (a) to (c). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

(a) and (b). Government is committed to make available essential medicines to the public in adequate quantities at fair and reasonable prices. While doing so reasonable returns are also ensured to the manufacturers. The prices of number of formulations based on Chlorpromazine, Thioridazine, Trifluoperazine, Amitryptiline, Imipramine, Triprolidine, Polymixin B. Sulphate, Flucinolone Acetonide, Oxyfedrine, Triameinolone etc. have already been reduced in the recent past. The existing drug policy is also under review and the objective of making drugs available at reasonable prices will be kept in mind.

(c) In such situations the following steps are taken to protect the interest of the consumers:

- (i) Prices of bulk drugs/raw materials procured by large manufacturers from abroad are constantly monitored.

- (ii) Wherever instances of over invoicing come to the notice of the Government, necessary action as per the provisions of law is taken.
- (iii) Efforts are made to get the prices from different sources to ensure that imports are competitive.

[Translation]

SHRIMATI SUBHASHINI ALI: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I regret to say that hon. Ministers statement in reply to the question does not cover all the questions I have asked. I wanted to know whether the new Government had been taking initiative to frame whether the new Government had been taking initiative to frame a policy to ensure the availability and manufacture of life saving drugs in adequate quantity for the consumers. The reply says that the prices are being constantly monitored and it has resulted in the reduction of prices. However, the fact is that during the last two years the prices of almost every medicine has registered an increase varying from 100 per cent to 200 per cent or even upto 380 per cent. If the hon. Minister so desires I can give him the full details in this regard. During the last session some officials of ONGC were planning to go on a three day strike But the hon. Minister become furious and wanted to put a bean on strike under ESMA to get it withdrawn. In this country, the drug companies and multi-national Corporations have been responsible for the deaths of the poor which have now formed a cartel and are engaged in blackmailing the entire country...

MR. SPEAKER: Please come to your question, you are supposed to ask two questions.

SHRIMATI SUBHASHINI ALI: Before their proposed strike an agreement had been signed sometime between July 31 and August 1. I would like to know about the conditions of the ONGC officials and the manufacturers that have been accepted by the Hon'ble Minister.

[English]

SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY: Sir, I agree with the hon. Member that essential drugs and life saving drugs are important and their production has got to be ensured.... (Interruptions) Keeping in view the commitment made by our Government that essential drugs have to be supplied to the consumer in adequate quantity and at a reasonable price, I started this exercise on my own, at my own initiative... (Interruptions)

[Translation]

SHRI JANARDAN TIWARI: Drugs have become so costly that people cannot afford to purchase them.

MR. SPEAKER: You have not been permitted, just listen.

(Interruptions)

[English]

SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY: I am not dissenting with the questioner... (Interruptions) As soon as I took over the Ministry, I have included about 21 life drugs under price control. Later on... (Interruptions)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: In the front bench of the House what a gas is being flared!... (Interruptions)

SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY: I take strong objection to this remark. I did not expect this remark from him... (Interruptions)

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: I request the hon. Minister to take this in humor... (Interruptions)

SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY: I have included already 21 drugs under price control. Later on, after the review by the Ministry, we have included another five such drugs under price control. In all, about 26 drugs have been included under price control. As a result of this inclusion, prices of nearly 164

formulations have been brought down. It is true that some of the drug manufacturers have been charging very high prices. For that purpose I have got a Standing Committee of my Department to go into the whole question. If the hon. Members can suggest anything, I will certainly look into that.

SHRIMATI SUBHASHINI ALI: Even the answer to the first question is totally inadequate. The question is of supplying essential drugs at reasonable price to the consumers. 20,000 new cases of kala-azar have been detected this year. That drug is in short supply. Anti-glucoma drug is in short supply. Anti-TB drug is in short supply. All the drugs of the diseases which afflict the poor people are in short supply. What is the Government doing to improve the supply of these essential drugs and at reasonable prices?

Now the Minister has said that the prices of 100 and odd drugs are being controlled. Before the new drug policy was announced by the last Government, prices of 343 drugs were being controlled. By saying that you have added 20 or 25 does not mean that price control is really being enforced as far as essential drugs are concerned. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what his Ministry is doing to see that essential drugs are made available to consumers at reasonable prices?

SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY: Though the distribution of drugs comes under the Health Ministry, we are also monitoring on the production side. Wherever there are cases of scarcity immediate steps are taken to remove that. If the hon. Members bring to my notice any specific cases of short supply I will certainly look into that... (*Interruptions*) When the case of short supply of anti-TB and other drugs has been brought to our notice, we have taken immediate steps to see that the supply is maintained... (*Interruptions*) The State Governments also have got to take steps to see that drug supplies are properly regulated and distributed. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI KAMAL NATH: The hon. Minister has asked for specific cases of drugs which are in short supply. The question is really not of short supply but supplying at proper prices because short supply implies that these are being sold in the black-market. I hope, the hon. Minister will agree with me on this. The Minister has rightly taken a stand against pharmaceutical companies in trying to recover their dues.

My question is that the stand which the Minister has taken and also the time to recover the dues from the pharmaceuticals companies may be the reasons why these companies have curtailed production which is giving cause to the short supply. Is this a fact?

SHRI M.S. GURUPADASWAMY: It is very clear that there cannot be shortages in production at all. There are cases of scarcity in the local areas because of the wrong distribution, mal-distribution and irregular distribution and we have alerted the State Governments to take steps to see that these essential drugs are made available. I have already said that the Health Ministry is looking to the matter and it is not my Ministry and I am not concerned with that.

[*Translation*]

SHRIMATI JAYAWANTINAVINCHANDRAMEHTA: Mr. Speaker, Sir, in today's list of Questions, Questions at S. No. 3 and 18 are about the increase in the prices of drugs. The hon. Minister has just now told that a meeting was held on June 21, but no concrete decision has been taken so far. Later on, a meeting was held again in the month of July but the prices of drugs in the market have not come down. Now my question is also what were the factors responsible for non-reduction of prices of drugs despite two meetings held in the months of June and July. Is the hon. Minister going to give that information to this House.