

Govt acts against 59 pharmaceutical firms, seizes drugs

ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Health Services (NHS) Aamer Mehmood Kiani has said that 226 medicines worth tens of millions of rupees, manufactured by 59 companies, have been confiscated by the government over the last few days.

“These companies were selling medicines at prices higher than the maximum retail prices (MRPs) due to which the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (Drap) was directed to act against these firms. We will not tolerate price hike as it directly affects poor people,” the minister said while speaking to journalists at the Press Information Department here on Sunday.

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Mr Kiani said that heavy fines were being imposed on those pharmaceutical companies which were involved in illegal increase in prices of medicines. He said the operation had been launched in Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar and medicines worth tens of -millions of rupees had been confiscated.

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“Moreover, we have also stopped manufacturing of those medicines which were being sold at higher rates as compared to MRPs. Not only fines are being imposed on the companies but additional prices will be recovered from them,” he said.

Minister says medicines were being sold at prices higher than those allowed by government

In reply to a question, the minister said 65,000 health cards were being printed daily and by the end of the year around 55 million people would be able to get free of cost medical treatment.

Meanwhile, provincial offices of Drap have been advised to direct federal drug inspectors to verify prices of drugs and immediately take action under the Drap Act, 2012, and Drug Act, 1976, if prices of drugs are found to be inflated.

According to an official statement, strict action has been initiated against those drug companies which had illegally increased prices of medicines. The action has been taken after complaints were received that pharmaceutical companies had increased prices of medicines over and above the MRPs allowed by the government.

Meanwhile, Executive Director of Pharma Bureau Ayesha Tammy Haq told Dawn that unfortunately the situation was very complicated. “The fact is that in 2013 the government had increased prices of medicines by 15 per cent but the very next day then prime minister Nawaz Sharif ordered withdrawal of that notification, but some companies went to the court and obtained a stay order due to which prices of medicines of those companies were increased, but prices of 60 per cent of products could not be increased at all,” she said.

She said that the government had in 2015 announced a drug pricing policy after -holding negotiations with representatives of the drug industry and other stake-holders, but “our recommendations were not included in the policy”.

She said that when Shahid Khaqan Abbasi became the prime minister, then chief justice of Pakistan Mian Saqib Nisar ordered formulation of a new drug policy and that was made, but the pharma industry’s demand for 25 per cent increase in prices of drugs was not accepted despite devaluation of the rupee against the dollar and only 15pc increase was allowed.

Ms Haq said the drug industry was the only private sector which was still controlled by the government, asserting that unnecessary and illogical criticism had been started against prices of medicines and in some cases wrong data was being used.

She added that none of the Pharma Bureau companies had increased prices in violation of the SRO and the Supreme Court orders.

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