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Malnutrition tonic has key ingredient missing

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The vitamin syrups administered to children in anganwadis may not have vitamins after all.

In a startling revelation, Bombay High Court was informed on Thursday that the syrup supplied to children in 12,868 anganwadis across the state lacked the vital vitamin component, 'D-Penthenol' (provitamin of B5 complex).

According to the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), this syrup is primarily administered in the tribal areas, where most malnourishment cases are reported.

On November 20 last year, the court had ordered an examination of the syrup, 'TO Vitamin'. The order came on a petition filed by two doctors from Amravati, Dr Rajendra Burma and Dr Ravindra Kolhe, in September 2007 urging the HC to direct the state government to take necessary steps to combat malnutrition deaths. They alleged that the syrup administered to children to protect them from malnutrition contained no proteins.

The court had asked both the government and the petitioners to conduct individual tests on the syrup and submit their reports to the court.

The reports submitted by the two parties, however, contradicted each other. "The government's test report said the syrup was all right but the report that we

have got from a government-approved laboratory in Mumbai says the sample of the syrup that was tested did not contain D-penthenol," Jugalkishore Gilda, advocate for the petitioners, said.

The report of Chemo Test Laboratory, procured in January 2008, stated that the syrup, manufactured by Hindustan Laboratories in Palghar, did not contain 'D-Penthenol', an important component in a multi-vitamin syrup essential for nourishment in children.

Ujjwal Uke, commissioner of ICDS, refuted the charges. "Our random samples tested fine," he said. The government spent Rs12.5 crore last year for supplying the syrup.

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The government informed the court that it had achieved its target of establishing 12,868 anganwadis. Chief justice Swatanter Kumar and justice VM Kanade, however, sought to know the source of the government's claim that all of them were operational. It directed the government pleader to file an affidavit within two weeks. The case has been adjourned to June 5.

The court warned the government that top bureaucrats would be taken to task if its claims were not substantiated.

In January this year, the court was informed that according to the data available with the state, 23,600 tribal children in Melghat region were malnourished; over 4,000 of them had grade III and IV malnutrition.

Bottle of contention

The state government and the Integrated Child Development



Scheme (ICDSO) department have vehemently denied the findings of the report.

They claimed that they had also sent samples for testing. "We have also sent samples for testing in a state-recognised

laboratory," said Dr P Doke, state director of health services. "And our findings did not match with that of the complainant's report," he said. Fresh samples would be sent to a third laboratory. "This has to be taken to a logical conclusion so we will look into all possible options," said Doke.

ICDS commissioner Ujjwal Uke said, "These tonics are given out throughout the year to boost the nutritional status of children. We have got samples from several areas tested and the report has already been submitted in court."