

# DRUG SHORTAGES PERSIST IN SRI LANKA AMID CONTINUING ECONOMIC CRISIS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Sri Lanka

Mounting woes: In 2021, Sri Lanka had imported more than \$800 million worth of pharmaceutical products. File Photo/DINUKA LIYANAWATTE

Sri Lanka's painful economic crisis may have let up a little, mainly for those who can afford higher living costs, but shortages continue to affect its noted health care system, according to officials and medical practitioners.

Despite international lending agencies and bilateral partners, especially India, pumping in emergency credit, the health sector is still short of over 150 essential drugs. "We are trying our best to maintain an optimum level of supplies, but there is a shortage," Dr. D.R.K. Herath, Deputy Director General of the Health Ministry's Medical Supplies Division, told *The Hindu*.

Compared to the severe shortages of fuel, food items, and medicines that Sri Lanka experienced earlier this year, when the government ran out of dollars, supplies have improved now, with the government rationing fuel, repurposing available funds, and obtaining support from bilateral partners, mainly India.

All the same, much of Sri Lanka's fundamental economic challenges remain. In October, headline inflation was at 66%, while food inflation was at 85.6%. The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) External Fund Facility (EFF), which Sri Lanka hoped would come through by the end of this year, may take longer, as Sri Lanka's efforts to restructure its debt — a prerequisite for the EFF — appear delayed.

## Significant factor

Meanwhile, to cope with the short supply of drugs, hospitals are using a recently set-up centralised system for supplies and coordinating among themselves. But the shortages are a "significant" factor for the day-to-day functioning of the country's health sector, said Dr. Surantha Perera, Vice-President of the Sri Lanka Medical Association, a national-level professional body for practitioners.

Drugs used for treatment of cancer are in short supply, doctors said, while pointing to a shortage of medical devices and reagents used for laboratory tests and investigations. Surgical supplies are inadequate and servicing medical equipment has become harder, they observed. "It is hard to quantify the impact of these shortages, but we can certainly say that it impacts the quality of medical care," Dr. Perera said.

Medical professionals are raising funds from donors abroad and within the country to cope, and working with the Health Ministry in its efforts to source drugs.

Over 80% of Sri Lanka's medical supplies are imported. In 2021, the island nation imported more than \$800 million worth of pharmaceutical products.

For many years, India has been a major supplier of essential drugs to Sri Lanka, said Sarath Liyanage, chairman of the State Pharmaceutical Corporation. Even now, Sri Lanka is counting on Indian companies to supply essential drugs. The Ranil Wickremesinghe government has

earmarked \$200 million for the purpose, from the billion-dollar credit line extended by India this year, as part of its nearly \$4 billion total assistance to Sri Lanka. “However, there are some administrative delays that affect swift supply of the medicines,” Mr. Liyanage said, pointing to an elaborate trail of paperwork involved in procuring drugs through the facility.

Further, new supplies are approved by the Indian authorities only after pending payments are cleared, sources aware of the credit line mechanism said. “This credit line is a new framework altogether for both sides. Everyone is trying their best to expedite the process,” a Colombo-based official said, requesting anonymity.

[Our code of editorial values](#)

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com

CrackIAS.com