

Solon assails Pfizer for 'blackmail'

THE vice chairman of the House Committee on Health called on Filipinos on Monday to boycott all products of Pfizer in protest against the pharmaceutical giant's alleged "blackmail" of the government over the latter's planned importation of cheaper medicines from India.

Lakas Rep. Fernejel Biron of Iloilo criticized Pfizer for filing charges before the Makati Court against the Philippine International Trading Corp (PITC) and the Bureau of Food and Drugs (BFAD) over PITC's plan to import medicines, especially the anti-hypertensive drug Norvasc.

Norvasc is being manufactured by Pfizer, but it was selling the medicine in the country at an extremely high price compared with the drug's price in India.

"Imagine a government of sovereign state being harassed and intimidated by a mere private corporation doing business and raking in millions in profits inside its territory?" Biron said.

"This is blackmail in its worst form," Biron said. The lawmaker is the main author of a bill that proposes to regulate the prices of drugs in the country. The bill is now on its way to second reading.

Pfizer's patent for Norvasc ends next year, prompting the PITC to file for an early application for registration of the same generic drug before the BFAD and an authority to import it from India and sell it at half of its prevailing price. *R. Acosta*

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