

From the Press Office

SUMMARY OF 12.30 NEWS



The Opposition Spokesman on Health, Dr. Blewitt has called for a searching enquiry into the Department of Health to discover how a computer error, resulting in overpayment of pharmacists remained undiscovered for so long. The Minister for Health told Parliament last night that chemists have been overpaid by the Federal Government by as much as \$235 million in the past seven years. Dr. Blewitt said there was now severe doubt about the Department's ability to supervise the payments. He said it was unpardonable that the error had remained undiscovered for so long and he called for much more searching reviews of pharmacy payments in the future.

Dr. Blewitt

It is quite clear that we need a much more searching enquiry particularly into the supervisory abilities of the Department of Health. Because an overpayment of this size of something like 50 or 60 cents per prescription is of such a nature that I think it's unpardonable that the Department was not aware at least of the problem even if it wasn't clear about the source or the size of the problem.

The Minister for Health, Mr. MacKellar said today that steps had been taken to ensure that overpayments to chemists by the Federal Government did not continue. The error was caused by lack of testing procedures when the pharmaceutical benefits scheme was computerised in 1972-73. Mr. MacKellar said the Department of Health had instituted more testing procedures as computer programmes were developed. As a result of the Public Service Board Enquiry which revealed the mistake other Government Departments have been advised to make sure that they had similar programming checks. The Attorney General's Office has advised the Government that the overpayment to chemists cannot be recovered by law.

Latest reports from Bristol say the rioters have now dispersed after police units armed with riot shields moved back into the St. Pauls area in what the Press Association describes as a massive show of co-ordinated force. This followed more than 6 hours of rioting by about 400 young West Indians who went on the rampage through the predominantly black district - burning, looting and fighting police. The violence began after police raided a club suspected of illegal dealing in drugs in liquor. 25 police were reported injured but none seriously.

The French Government has unveiled plans for nuclear power to reduce the role of oil to 30 per cent of the country's energy needs by 1990. France currently depends on oil for 56 per cent of its energy. Under the multi million dollar plan nuclear power will be expected to provide 30 per cent of energy needs by 1990 compared with less than 5 per cent last year. The plan also calls for far reaching energy saving measures during the next decade in industry, housing, offices, transportation and electricity. More than \$15,000 million are to be invested in industry to reduce oil consumption.

The uranium company Pan Continental Mining has denied entering into firm contracts with a Japanese company for the sale of yellow cake from its Jabaluka deposit. Pan Continental's Chairman, Mr. Grey in a statement today said the company was well aware it could not

negotiate sales contracts until the Jabaluka project received the Government approval. Mr. Grey said his company had been very embarrassed by recent statements attributed to the Japanese company that it had been given exclusive rights for the sale of Jabaluka uranium in Japan. Mr. Grey said the Japanese company had been approved as Pan Continental's sole marketing agent but only if and when the governments gave the go-ahead for Jabaluka. No sales contracts could be entered into without this approval.

In response to Iran's demands over the American hostages, President Carter has given a more forceful pledge that the United States will be restrained in words and actions as long as progress is being made to end the crisis. Mr. Jody Powell read a statement the day after Dr. Bani Sadr had insisted on a formal statement that the US would refrain from provocation or propoganda against Iran. Geoff McMullen reports from Washington.

More than half of all school girls in Sydney and Hobart aged from 11 to 16 had either taken up cigarette smoking or had regular smoking experience according to recent studies. The figures are from research conducted by Professor Anne Lewis in Tasmania and Dr. Gary Eggar of the Health Commission of NSW.

Heavy fighting is continuing in Chad and Red Cross workers have been warned to expect the final battle within 24 hours. The warning came from the Defence Minister whose forces are battling the President's forces for control of the capital city.

The NSW Meat Industry Authority has assured consumers that it is safe to eat smallgoods and meat pies following big seizures of contaminated buffalo meat. About 75 tonnes of contaminated meat from the Northern Territory has been seized in NSW over the past 8 months.

Sydney footballers and coaches began their action in the NSW Supreme Court today over their right to have stories under their names published in the newspapers.

The British anti royalist M.P. Mr. Willy Hamilton has labelled Princess Margaret as a wayward woman in his latest attack on the royal family.