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# Experts want crackdown on formula milk promoters

■ Say breastfeeding is decreasing in urban area women, lack of exclusive breastfeeding major cause of high infant mortality rate

By Fazal Sher

**ISLAMABAD:** Health experts at a seminar on Wednesday pressed the government for cracking down on those discouraging breastfeeding to promote formula milk.

They also demanded strict enforcement of the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance, 2002, to promote breastfeeding.

The seminar, titled 'Role of Media in Promotion of Breastfeeding and Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD)', was

organised by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection (TNCP) at a local hotel.

Dr Shahid Awan, of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), highlighted the importance of breastfeeding and called for regular breastfeeding of infants, especially during the first six months of birth, to save their lives. He said women should be educated on breastfeeding for infant well-being.

According to him, breastfeeding among urban area women is decreasing and thus, leading to

death of lots of infants. He warned infant mortality rate due to breastfeeding would further rise in cities if authorities didn't take corrective measures forthwith.

The UNICEF official said start of breastfeeding within one hour of birth reduced neonatal mortality rate by 31 percent. He said exclusive and complementary breastfeeding reduced death rate among children under five by 13 percent and six percent respectively.

He said around 50 to 60 percent infant deaths were caused by poor infant feeding practices.

He said breastfeeding improved maternal health and decreased chances of breast and ovarian cancers among women.

Awan also said breastfeeding increased the duration of birth intervals and maternal risks of closely spaced pregnancies.

Dr Sher Baz, a pediatrician, said the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance, 2002, prohibited people from promoting formula milk and bottle-fed complementary food as a replacement of breast milk. He said anyone con-

travening the provisions of the ordinance could be sent to jail.

Rubina Bhatti, a TNCP representative, said recent studies showed that initiation of exclusive breastfeeding of infants during the first hour of birth and its continuity for six months alone could reduce neonatal mortality rate by 22 percent.

She said high infant mortality rate was mostly attributed to lack of exclusive breastfeeding, early and inadequate complementary feeding, and use of unhygienic bottles and formula milk.