

Experts for joint efforts to promote breastfeeding

ISLAMABAD, July 15: Health experts advised provincial government on Thursday to have an integrated approach in implementing the breastfeeding rules.

As prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding is low in Pakistan, the government along with the civil society should continue with efforts to increase the level of awareness through advocacy sessions at every level, the experts said.

They were speaking at a preparatory meeting of the National Alliance for Promotion and Protection of Breastfeeding (NAPBF), organised by The Network.

The meeting gathered 22 civil society organisations for preparing the agenda of activities that will be unveiled during the breastfeeding week to be observed in the first week of August. This year's theme is "Breastfeeding – Just 10 Steps! The Baby-Friendly Way.

According to them, malnutrition is the key reason for majority of deaths among

children. More than 50 per cent child mortality in Pakistan can be attributed to causes related to malnutrition.

However, the issue of malnutrition could be addressed with increased awareness among mothers and communities of breastfeeding, and the implementation of the rules. Dr Baseer Khan Achakzai, deputy director general of the Ministry of Health's nutrition wing, said the government was committed to implementing the breastfeeding rules.

"We have constituted a National Infant Feeding Board at the federal level and are in the process to extend this practice at provincial level by constituting committees for monitoring and registering complaints."

He further said the government had played its role by notifying these rules, and urged the civil society and health professionals to participate in promoting breastfeeding among mothers.

"Implementation of these rules is not

possible without motivation and advocacy at every level," Dr Achakzai said.

Replying to a suggestion about a total ban on the breast milk substitute formulas, the official rejected the idea, saying the breastfeeding ordinance of 2002 and subsequent rules could play important role in discouraging these formulas.

Sheeba Afghani of the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) said the breastfeeding week was a good opportunity to create awareness among people of the practice.

Rubina Bhatti of The Network talked about the importance of behavioral change for promotion of breastfeeding.

Dr Shahid of Unicef felt the need for strengthening the existing system and collaboration among all the stakeholders, including government and the civil society.

Dr Aisha of The Network shared the list of activities of the alliance in last two years.—A Reporter