

Iodised salt intake dips to 17pc

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD, Oct 22: As the international community prepared to mark Iodine Deficiency Disorder Day on Friday with significant advances and campaigns to ensure good health, Pakistan has progressively lagged behind its South Asian neighbours in salt iodisation policy.

The Network for Consumer Protection said on Thursday that in Pakistan iodised salt intake had dipped to 17 per cent from a high of 90 per cent during vigorous campaigns back in the 90s, it had increased to nearly 80 per cent both in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Iodine deficiency was the world's most prevalent, yet easily preventable, cause of brain damage. This micronutrient deficiency disorder was most commonly seen among poor, pregnant women and pre-school children.

The whole spectrum of health consequences linked were birth defects, increased neonatal mortality, brain damage, goitre and thyroid, impaired physical and mental growth and diminished school performances besides decreased fertility, spontaneous abortions and still-births in pregnant women. Pakistan ranked 6th amongst the countries where iodine deficiency was a serious public health problem, despite efforts over the past several decades there has been little improvement

in the situation.

According to the most recent National Nutrition Survey of Pakistan in 2001-02, more than 50 per cent population of the country was at risk of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (IDDs). The survey said that nearly 30 per cent of school children and 36.5 per cent of mothers of children under 5 years of age were severely deficient in iodine.

The 1990 World Summit for Children set the goal of eliminating iodine deficiencies by 2000 and Pakistan government planned to eliminate IDD by the year 2000. The national goal of Universal Salt Iodisation (USI) was modified to 2010 and elimination of iodine deficiency was to be achieved by 2013.

Executive Coordinator of The Network for Consumer Protection, Dr Arif Azad, said that IDD global days provided an opportunity to take stock of slippage from health targets on USI campaign.

It was troubling that Pakistan had fallen behind Bangladesh and Nepal. Steady investment and a strong political government could improve public health goals of mother and child health by fully signing up to the USI campaign.

"By promoting awareness and consumer demand for iodised salt we can prevent a whole generation from falling into diminished mental and physical health," he said.