

Law on breastfeeding awaits implementation

By Imran Ali Teepu

ISLAMABAD, Oct 1: The health ministry has failed to implement the Breastfeeding Ordinance 2002 promulgated seven years ago, allegedly under the pressure of a few baby formula milk companies, *Dawn* has learnt.

"Globally, the baby formula milk companies have been seen creating hurdles against such legislations," Dr Arif Azad, who is running the secretariat of an alliance of 14 NGOs, said.

The alliance along with senior paediatricians helped the govern-

ment develop the ordinance.

"Had the government implemented this ordinance, thousands of lives could have been saved in the last few years," Dr Azad maintained.

According to the '2007 Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey', only 23 per cent of the infants are exclusively breastfed.

Sources in the federal government said several clauses of the ordinance would affect the business of the milk companies.

"It is the incompetence as well as

the pressure from these companies on the health ministry that the government is still working on rules and regulations of the ordinance," said a senior paediatrician.

"These clauses will squeeze the operation of these companies one way or the other," he added.

One of the clauses says: "No person shall in any manner assert that any designated product is substitute for mother's milk, or that it is equivalent to or comparable with or superior to mother's milk."

The paediatrician noted that

doctors and health workers often suggested formula milk to the newborns which, he said, had a negative impact on their health.

The clause on the labels on the tin of formula milk also suggests that the tins should not contain anything that may discourage breastfeeding, and also bans showing of photographs, drawings or graphics, he said.

The paediatrician was of the view that even the implementation phase of the ordinance would be a tough task for the health authori-

ties.

When approached, Director-General Health Rashid Jooma said: "The allegations that formula milk companies are behind the delay of the implementation of the ordinance are completely inaccurate."

"We (health ministry) are under no pressure from the multinational companies and the rules and regulations of the ordinance will be completed within a week," Dr Jooma added.

However, he did not explain as to what was the cause behind the de-

lay in the implementation of the ordinance.

When asked that some NGOs questioned changes in the regulations and rules of the ordinance, he said: "We are just asking them (NGOs) that formula milk companies should be brought under the drug control section of the ministry."

However, another senior paediatrician was of the view that drug companies would go to court against this step and feared that the ordinance might never get implemented.