

Protection of Breast-feeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002

Ord yet to be implemented

FOZIA AZAM

ISLAMABAD - The Ministry of Health is apparently playing in hands of the powerful infant formula milk manufacturers, which made it 'unable' to come up with clear mind on the issue of implementation of the 'Protection of Breast-feeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002'.

After a lapse of seven long years of the promulgation of the ordinance, the Ministry was just recently able to approve the rules and regulations necessary for effective implementation of the said law.

But due to the mounting pressure of the industry, the Ministry soon took back the regulations on the pretext that the implementation of the ordinance could only be possible after declaring the child milk formula equal to drugs.

The Ministry bosses decided to declare the infant formula milk as drug through amendment in the Drug Act 1976, as it considered the ordinance could not effectively be implemented without changing the said Act.

"However, after consulting with legal experts, the Ministry came to know that it was not practically

possible for them to declare the breast milk substitutes as drugs, as the same fall under the category of food. Thus, in a welcome move the Ministry stepped back on the non-sense proposal," disclosed a Ministry official while requesting not to be named.

"Were the infant formula milk declared as drug, its manufacturers would have been allowed to market their products by distributing free samples like other medicines to the doctors and health professionals", he continued.

"The existent laws state that the mother's milk substitutes could not be marketed as ordinary drug and should only be administered to children if there is acute need", he further informed.

"So now having no solid reason in hand, the Ministry is just trying to further delay the matter, whereas the lame excuses made by the Ministry are delaying tactics by the civil society organisations, which were continuously pursuing the Ministry to notify the rules on emergency basis", he added.

He opined that the Ministry of Health has succumbed to the mounting pressure of the industry. "As by referring

towards the loopholes 'discovered' in the final draft of the rules prepared after lapse of seven years, 'the Ministry is trying to linger on the notification of the said law' he further maintained.

He said that the notification of these rules and regulations was due since long as the Ministry had finalised the rules after extensive consultation with all stakeholders including provinces long ago.

"The ordinance was promulgated in the backdrop of the fast decline in breast-feeding practice in Pakistan, which was ultimately contributing to the increasing infant mortality rate, which stands at 78 per 1,000 live births", he maintained.

Out of these 57 are those who die before reaching one month of age due to diarrhea, pneumonia, respiratory infections and malnutrition. A major source of these diseases due to lack of exclusive breast-feeding, use of unhygienic bottles, formula milk and teats.

It is worth mentioning here that without notification of the rules the said ordinance is still in implementing phase and it could effectively serve the purpose it was promulgated for.