

# THE NEWS

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## Withering breastfeeding laws need implementation

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ISLAMABAD: If the Protection of Breastfeeding and Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002 is not to be bracketed amongst the existing unimplemented pieces of social legislation in Pakistan, action must be taken now.

A nationwide survey of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection reflects that the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes is being openly violated in the country's cities and even remote towns and villages where the powerful industry is influencing the health workers to promote infant formulae.

Persuasions such as 'breastfeeding not efficacious for mothers' health' or 'breastmilk does not serve all the nutrients for a baby,' etc., have also played a vital role in enabling the industry to expand its influence on mothers. The dilemma orchestrated by the industries' magnetic advertisements that promise infants' healthy state of well being, has also proven to imperil breastfeeding.

A large number of infants in Pakistan suffer from malnutrition merely because of the unhindered marketing and promotion of breastmilk substitutes and the absence of a regulatory mechanism because the only law in this context, which aimed to protect breastfeeding practice from the commercial onslaught of the baby food industry, still exists on paper, with no defined implementation

procedure in sight.

The government took 21 years (from 1981 to 2002) to translate the minimal provisions of the International Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes into law, and has since then largely ignored implementation. In the last four years since promulgation of the Ordinance, the Ministry of Health has just recently been able only to notify rules for a National Infant Feeding Board formed under the Ordinance.

According to TheNetwork report, this Board, which is tasked to formulate Rules and Regulations of the Ordinance, formally includes a representative from the industry which is to be regulated. This is prohibited under the International Code. All this despite the fact that draft rules and regulations, proposed by health experts, have been available with the Ministry of Health for over two years. Consequently, the provisions of the legislation remain on the Ministry's shelves, and no action can be initiated against the industry's unethical promotion.

The infant mortality rate in Pakistan is estimated at 75.9 per 1,000 births, which is the highest in SAARC. The report calls upon the government to protect the health of its citizens by notifying full Rules and Regulations of the law for its implementation; developing a national action plan for implementation of the law; and establishing a mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the law.