

Date:14/02/2005 URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/2005/02/14/stories/2005021410320400.htm>

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Activists flay `bid' to curtail breastfeeding

Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, FEB. 13. Reacting to the Ministry of Food Processing Industry's proposal to repeal the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992 as amended in 2003 (IMS Act) through a modern Food Safety and Standard Bill 2005, the Breastfeeding Promotional Network of India (BPNI) and several organisations and individuals concerned about the health, nutrition, development and survival of children came together this past week to jointly sign a people's petition titled "Save the IMS Act".

The meeting was jointly called by the BPNI, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA), India Alliance for Child Rights (IACR) and Voluntary Health Association of India (VAHI). Professional organisation that signed the petition included the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and Indian Academy of Paediatrics among others.

In his letter, the IMA general secretary, Vinay Aggarwal, said: "repealing of such a useful Act would take away the initiative for promotion of the age-old process of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months to which the Government is also a signatory with the World Health Organisation. The BPNI and the Association for Consumers Action on Safety and Health (ACASH), two organisations that focus on breastfeeding issues and are gazetted under the IMS Act to monitor its compliance, are obviously concerned and note that India cannot afford to do away with IMS Act."

Meanwhile, expressing shock at the latest order, the director of the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), Anwar Fazal, said: "With the repealing of the IMS ACT 2003, the consequences would ultimately result in disease and deaths of Indian babies and children. By doing away with such an important piece of legislation, health and nutrition of infants and young children in India would be scarified."

UNICEF and WHO estimate that of the 10.9 million children who die, 2.4 million die in India alone. Most of these deaths are due to diarrhoea, pneumonia and neonatal diseases and promoting exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continued breastfeeding for the next six months could contribute to the reduction in 16 per cent deaths.

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