

EMBARGOED 21st May 2021-PRESS RELEASE

WORLD BREASTFEEDING PROTECTION DAY

Breastfeeding under attack by the Baby Milk industry, Feeding Bottle manufacturers, and other Corporations.

While the Union Health Ministry seeks to enforce the Indian law that protects and promotes breastfeeding, diverse corporate entities including Abbott, Amazon, Apollo Pharmacy, Danone-Nutricia, Nestle, Medela, Mead Johnson-Reckitt, Philips -Avent, and YouTube are finding new ways to infringe the law.

May 20,2021. NEW DELHI. : The Covid -19 pandemic raised tremendous challenges to breastfeeding; first, because of inadequate dissemination of the knowledge that breastfeeding by a mother who is Covid-19 positive is not only safe, but beneficial; but secondly and more seriously, because of the greed of the baby milk industry and others seeking to jump on their bandwagon.

It was found that these corporations and groups were brazenly flouting our stringent law that prohibits such manufacturers/suppliers from promoting their products directly, sponsoring or funding medical research or otherwise financing any part of the health care system.

A new report, “UNDER ATTACK”, by the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) reveals a series of violations of the *Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992* (the IMS Act) during the past 2 years. These examples unearthed by BPNI are the tip of the iceberg, and demonstrate the intent of these corporate violators. The Report documents violations of a number of provisions of the IMS Act, and it especially exposes the manner in which the industry has trained its focus on the healthcare system in order to defeat the statute.

The IMS Act defines “health worker” as a person engaged in health care for mothers, infants or pregnant women, and prohibits both direct and indirect promotion of infant milk substitutes, feeding bottles and infant foods through the health care system. Section 9.2 of the IMS Act clearly forbids any benefits for sponsorship or research to health workers who are caring for mothers and babies. <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/IMSamendact2003.pdf>

9(1) No person who produces, supplies, distributes or sells infant milk substitutes or feeding bottles or infant foods shall offer or give, directly or indirectly, any financial inducements or gifts to a health worker or to any member of his family for the purpose of promoting the use of such substitutes or bottles or foods.

(2) No producer, supplier or distributor referred to in sub-section (1), shall offer or give any contribution or pecuniary benefit to a health worker or any association of health workers,

including funding of seminar, meeting, conferences, educational course, contest, fellowship, research work or sponsorship.

Dr. Arun Gupta, Central coordinator of the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) said: “This report presents 33 gross and blatant violations of the IMS Act, which attract the section 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9; demanding strict action by the authorities. We need to be aware that violation of the IMS Act is a criminal offence, cognisable under the IPC.” BPNI has been monitoring compliance with the IMS Act since 1995 when the Government of India notified BPNI in the official Gazette to perform this function, an organisation committed to protect breastfeeding for the last 30 years. (www.bpni.org)

The Report will be launched on the occasion of the [World Breastfeeding Protection Day](#) on 21st May. We join hundreds of thousands of breastfeeding advocates that include young people and organizations that all over the world to commemorate this day. The World Health Assembly adopted the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* on May 21, 40 years ago in 1981. The Code is the most powerful tool to monitor baby food companies. It was decided to observe 21 May as the World Breastfeeding Protection Day each year and this year kicks off with in many a countries.

Says **Syed Aamir Raza, a Nestle Whistler Blower and inspiration behind the feature film TIGERS**, which is based on his true life story: “Corporate power, malpractice & silencing is the game played by these greedy companies even as WHO and UNICEF and the Code recognised the dangers of commercial marketing of baby foods on infant health.” The [Global Breastfeeding Collective is celebrating 40 years of the Code this year.](#)

Mr. Chander Uday Singh, senior advocate, said: “Many of these violations merit a full-fledged investigation, whether by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, or by any other appropriate agency, should consider launching prosecutions,. Recent government actions such as writing to health organisations is helpful, but not sufficient.”

On the Covid front, **argues Dr Vandana Prasad, a community Pediatrician** who works with one of the country's oldest people's health movements, “It is a shame that companies producing breast milk substitutes are using the pandemic to further their products with the collusion of influencers on social media, some members of the medical community as well as people in administration, as evidenced in the report. Equally problematic is the fact that nursing mothers are being unnecessarily discriminated against by the denial of vaccines, even as other countries have found it safe to provide vaccines to pregnant and lactating women. This, of course, will also needlessly force women to stop breastfeeding to protect themselves and their babies from Covid-19!”

A recent study points out that 1 in 2 health workers do not have adequate knowledge with regard to COVID-19 and the practice of breastfeeding.

“Baby food companies are approaching new moms, pregnant mothers and influencers for endorsement of their products through platforms like Instagram and Youtube, using new tactics to reach mothers . They are exploiting the internet portals and this must stop” **says Nupur Bidla, PhD Scholar**, School of Social Work, Jamia Milia Islamia, Central University, Delhi.

Despite the fact that the health of children, people and the entire planet is threatened by large commercial interests and powerful corporations, today we celebrate the strength of the people, and pay tribute to the struggle of so many people and organizations like International Baby Food

Action Network (IBFAN www.ibfan.org), the 1998 Right Livelihood Laureate; who have focused their fight on the protection of breastfeeding and on the defence of the rights of mothers and their babies globally through their strong network.

BPNI has written a letter to Dr Harsh Vardhan, Hon'ble Minister of Health, seeking the Government of India's intervention to investigate such cases and launch prosecution where indicated.

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