

Lawmakers committed for Food regulation in ICT

ISLAMABAD: The Parliamentarians committed for the early regulation of food regulatory law for Islamabad Capital Territory. They spoke during the media event of “Orientation of Media on Safe Food in ICT” organized by TheNetwork for Consumer Protection on 25th February, 2021 at Islamabad Hotel, Islamabad.

Two different laws were presented last year in the National Assembly and Senate. Both houses passed the bills but are pending in the Senate and the National Assembly respectively.

Ms. Hina Kayani, Project Coordinator, TheNetwork said that ICT is the only place where there is no food regulatory body. He said either National Assembly may pass the bill already passed by the Senate or else the Senate may pass the bill presented by the National Assembly.

The event was organized with the support of GAIN (The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition).

Dr. Nousheen Hamid Parliamentary Secretary, National Health Services Regulations and Coordination, also shared her views on the importance of a food regulatory authority and assured that she will take up the issue in the Senate as well.

She also discussed the importance of Food Fortification and the importance of the Mother and Child Health. She also discussed Iodine deficiency and its adverse impacts on the masses in general.

She also threw light on the fact that the Prime Minister Imran Khan in his first address also discussed the issue of stunting and wasting in children while showing two X-rays which highlights the readiness and the sensitization of the government over this issue.

She also discussed that the new born child mortality rates are higher in Pakistan, as well as, the issue of iron deficiency and consequent anemia affect the young girls and the future mothers.

As a government representative of Health Standing Committee, she was of the view that these issues must not be ignored and this is a matter of public interest which must be brought to light and the process of the establishment of the relevant authority must be expedited.

Senator A. Rahman Malik also joined the session and insisted on the importance of the consumers and their rights. He further discussed the dismal situation of issues related to hygiene and unmonitored production and consumption patterns.

He added that this issue that was taken up by TheNetwork was of prime importance as a food authority is necessary for Islamabad. He further talked about the general food habits and the unregulated stalls selling different food items outside the schools and colleges that usually go unchecked.

He also talked about the bill presented in the senate which aimed at the creating of a Food Authority. He showed his complete willingness over the early and successful passage of the bill and the formation of the ICT Food Authority.

He also talked about the halal food issues still going on and emphasized that these issues will not get resolved and addressed until and unless there is a representative body to cater to these complaint and system of redress for the consumers.

He added that the people are the most important part of a society and they elect representatives who are supposed to highlight their issues and get them resolved. Hence, the consumers that are the people are the top priority and for their ease a regulatory body is inevitable.

All provinces have food authorities along with their relevant laws, except Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

In ICT there is no proper legislation of the food safety laws that jeopardize the institutionalization prospects of the ICT Food Authority. Two ICT Food Safety Acts bills have been presented so far for the legislation and eventual formulation of the food authority of Islamabad.

One bill was presented in 2019 by Mr. Sajjad Tori (member Senate) from erstwhile FATA that was a private member bill by the name of ICT Pure Food Act in Senate. The bill was approved from the Senate on June 8, 2020.

The bill was then sent to the National Assembly where it kept lying for debate and approval in order to be forwarded to the President for final approval. However, none of the sort happened.

On the other hand, Ali Nawaz (member NA), special assistant to PM on ICT, presented ICT Food Safety Act bill in 2020 as a private member in National Assembly. The bill got passed from the National Assembly and was sent to the Senate for debate and approval.

However, there has been no development since the passage of the bill from the National Assembly to the Senate.

Additionally, all the provinces established their own respective Food Authorities after the devolution occurred and they have been working on some initiatives for food fortification laws and strategies as well.

Punjab Food Authority that was formed in 2011, announced mandatory food fortification in 2014 as the PFA began with the formation of the strategies for food fortification in the province.

Similarly, Sindh food Authority was established in 2018 under the Sindh Food Authority Act 2016. Sindh Food Fortification Bill 2019 has been passed, which made food fortification mandatory throughout the province.

Likewise, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Food Safety Authority Act was passed in 2014 leading to the establishment of the KP Food Authority. In Baluchistan, a Food Authority Act was passed in 2014 (Act No. VI of 2014). The act provided for the safety and standards of food and for establishment of Baluchistan Food Authority.

In comparison with the provinces, it is not a very favorable situation that the Capital does not have any established food authority and not even a proper legislation for establishing one.

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