2 years after Maggi ban: Food firms, regulators still walk on thin ice

On Wednesday, instant noodle brand Maggi was in the spotlight for failing laboratory tests conducted in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh. The current run-in coming after the lead-in-noodle issue that surfaced in May 2015 and was finally settled in 2016. This time food regulators found excess presence of ash content in Maggi, manufactured and marketed by Nestlé India, points to the difficult relationship shared by the company and the regulator.
Nestlé, however, is not the only company to come under regulatory scanner in the past few months. Baba Ramdev’s Patanjali Ayurved was twice in the news this year for food safety violations pertaining to its atta noodles and amla juice, respectively. Earlier in the year, the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) asked Hardcastle Restaurants, which runs McDonald’s outlets in west and south India, to serve soft-drinks with warning labels.

Nestlé India in a conversation with Business Standard said it was yet to receive a copy of the UP FDA notice and that the lab report may have been formed based on quality standards that are now obsolete. “We wish to reassure our consumers that Maggi noodles are 100 per cent safe for consumption. We strongly reiterate that at no stage of manufacturing process, ash is added to the noodles. It is fully compliant with the standards set by FSSAI,” a company spokesperson said.

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), said that he was yet to hear from the two. “We are monitoring the situation closely. We have not heard from the company (Nestlé) or the state body (UP FDA) yet. Having said that, we have revised the standards for noodles, and ash content, excluding acid insoluble ash, is no longer an issue. Yes, when it comes to acid insoluble ash, there is a limit prescribed by FSSAI and it is to be seen whether this limit has been breached based on the new standards (for noodles).”