Conflict of interest slur on India's top food safety regulator FSSAI

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NEW DELHI: Swadeshi Jagran Manch, an RSS affiliate on economic issues has raised serious concerns about the country’s top food safety regulator FSSAI’s tie-ups with Nestle Nutrition and some other MNCs saying it involves “conflict of interest” and has demanded a thorough government investigation.

The body has strongly objected to the regulator’s recent move to allow imported infant speciality food in the country by four multi-national food giant companies, with whom, it has also entered into “social awareness partnerships.”

The Manch, which is set to register its complaints to the Prime Minister Office, Niti Aayog and the Union ministry of Health and Family Welfare, says that the FSSAI’s links with the MNCs are “dubious and should be investigated thoroughly”.

“In June 2015, Maggi, a product by Nestle, was in the eye of the storm for some extremely harmful ingredients in it. The issue has completely vanished now and FSSAI has joined hands with it and some other companies to raise awareness on nutritional safety—that’s alarming,” Ashwani Mahajan, national co-convener of the Manch told this newspaper.

FSSAI has recently partnered with four MCNs Abbot, Danone Nutricia, Mead Johnson Nutrition and Nestle India for its Diet 4 Life scheme that aims to address the challenges faced by infants suffering from Inborn Errors of Metabolism (IEM).

These four MNCs jointly run an NGO-Infant and Young Child Nutrition Council (IYNCI) that aims at providing "Optimal nutrition for all Indian mothers, infants and young children".

“It’s a clear-cut case of conflict of interest as these four companies are immensely going to benefit from the FSSAI’s order to allow imports of infant speciality food which was earlier not permitted to be imported and sold in the country,” said Mahajan.

“It also needs to be checked whether due process has been followed in granting the permissions and consultations were held to assess repercussion of such a move.”

Pawan Aggarwal, the chief executive officer, FSSAI, however, defended the authority’s decision saying all the legal concerns were studied before entering into the partnership.

“Apart from regulatory role, we also have a promotional role to ensure food safety in the country – as the initiative is part of that endeavour,” he said. “As far as Maggi controversy is concerned that was resolved long ago after the contended ingredients were removed from the product—we can't dwell on the same issue forever.”