

India seeks \$100m in damages from Nestle after noodle ban

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India's government is seeking damages of nearly \$100 million from Nestle for "unfair trade practices" after the food safety watchdog banned its hugely popular Maggi noodles brand.

The government said Wednesday it had filed a suit with the country's top consumer court for 6,400 million rupees (\$98.6 million) in damages from the Indian arm of the Swiss food giant.

India's food safety watchdog in June banned Nestle from making or selling noodles in the country after tests by some states found lead levels exceeded statutory limits.

Nestle has withdrawn the product in India but continues to sell it elsewhere, and has always denied the charge.

"We filed the complaint with the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) yesterday and have sought around 6,400 million rupees in damages," G, Gurcharan, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, told AFP.

"Our complaint is over their unfair trade practices and the court will now issue them notices to hear their response," Gurcharan added.

A Nestle India spokesman told AFP that the company had not yet received official notice about the complaint with the NCDRC, a semi-judicial body that has the power to fine companies.

But in a statement late Wednesday, the firm said it was "disappointed with the (government's) unprecedented step of filing" the complaint, and reiterated that Maggi was safe to eat.

Nestle India is challenging the ban on Maggi noodles in the Mumbai high court, which is expected to deliver its verdict on Thursday.

It had been selling the brand for over three decades in India, and had 80 percent of the country's instant noodle market before the ban.

Several celebrities have endorsed Maggi over the years, including Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan.

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