

India's ban on China formula: Industry expert frowns upon regulator's call to extend 11-year-old restrictions

By Cheryl Tay [✉](#)

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Indian regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), has urged the government to again extend its 11-year-old ban on Chinese milk products until labs at Indian ports have been upgraded for melamine testing.

The ban, which was first imposed by the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry's General Directorate of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in September 2008, was brought about by the infamous and tragic melamine milk scandal in China that killed six infants and put 54,000 in hospital.

The initial ban was to last three months as an interim measure, but a notice issued on December 1, 2008 said the ban would be extended for another six months to June 23, 2009.

Multiple extensions

Since then, the ban has been extended multiple times. On December 6, 2018, the FSSAI met with government authorities to review the issue, and agreed that the ban should be extended from December 24, 2018 to April 23, 2019.

On December 21, 2018, however, the FSSAI announced that the ban would be further extended, though it did not specify an end-date this time around.

In addition to milk products, including formula, the ban also covers chocolate products, confectionery, and foods containing milk or milk solids.

According to the FSSAI, it had once again reviewed the matter during a recent meeting with the relevant government ministries.

In an advisory letter released afterwards, it stated: *"The ban on the import of milk and milk products, including chocolates and chocolate products and candies / confectionery / food preparations from milk and milk solids as ingredients from China may be extended until the capacity of all laboratories at ports of entry have been suitably upgraded for testing melamine."*

Overreaching and overreacting?

One industry expert has expressed her disagreement with the ongoing ban and its repeated extensions surrounding milk products from China.

Cathy Yu, GM of the Food Business Division at China's Chemical Inspection and Regulation Service (CIRS), argued that safety standards in China's milk product segment were sufficient, saying the FSSAI's push for the ban to continue was unnecessary.

Indeed — at least in China's infant formula sector — safety standards have risen significantly over the last decade. This looks unlikely to change, especially as the State Administration for Market Regulation (SAMR) has been [cracking down](#) on the domestic health food and supplement market in quick succession.

In fact, industry believes China's domestic formula products are now *'safer than ever'*, with an unprecedented safety rating of 99.5%.

Speaking to *NutraIngredients-Asia*, Yu said: *"In my opinion, the regulations and standards in China, especially for infant formula, are strict enough."*

"Any company that wants to manufacture formula in China must show their products are safe and that the ingredients are fully and accurately declared."

"It also has to go through multiple levels of registration, which costs a lot of time and money. This is not something they can afford to take lightly."

She did, however, acknowledge that the 2008 incident involving domestic formula firm Sanlu's melamine-tainted infant formula was well known globally, and might still affect consumer confidence in China-made milk products.

"Maybe the Indian government is still worried about this issue (of melamine). But as far I know, each batch of infant formula manufactured in China needs to be tested for melamine before it is permitted for sale, both in China and in other countries."

She added that there might still be room for improvement when it came to Chinese-made milk products, possibly in the areas of testing and research, but also said there were no urgent or drastic changes needed at the moment.

"Although the safety standards for other dairy products are not as strict as those for infant formula, the Chinese government is still very concerned about melamine contamination."

"Updated regulations have ensured that dairy products in general are now much safer than before, and considering how tough the SAMR is on offenders, I doubt anyone would dare add melamine to their products."