

19 October 2007

KUALA LUMPUR -- Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak not long ago suggested that consumerism be taught as a subject in schools to create well-informed and savvy shoppers from young.

BERNAMA posed several questions to the National Consumer Complaints Centre on this idea and below is the response given by NCCC director Darshan Singh:

(NCCC was jointly initiated by the Education and Research Association for Consumers (ERA Consumers), Selangor and Federal Territory Consumer Association and the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs).

Q:

Is there a need for consumerism to be taught as a subject in schools?

Darshan:

It is very important that consumerism is taught in schools. Consumers have to be very well educated and well equipped with the necessary knowledge if we are ever going to create a well informed consumer society. Currently, consumerism is considered a trivial issue by many.

If the importance of consumerism is not cultivated from the very beginning, society will never know and realise its importance. With globalisation and trade liberalisation, we are being exposed to goods and services from the world over. Marketing teams are becoming ever more creative in sales and marketing strategies.

Q:

Keeping in mind the fact that Malaysians in general are not savvy consumers, is the move to educate and create smart consumers from young a laudable one?

Darshan:

Yes, education is an on-going process. It has to be taken seriously. Without concerted efforts

we are not going to reach anywhere. Every consumer must be a consumerist, this is what we want to see.

Currently we find that people only take interest in consumer matters if they are directly affected. They visit agencies like NCCC, for instance, and this too provided they know where to turn to for help. Many still do not know where to go for assistance and what redress mechanism is available to them. This is sad. Until and unless there is a change in the mindset of the people, status quo will remain. That is why education from the very beginning is important.

Q:

How effectively can the subject of consumerism be taught in schools, i.e. should it be taught by teachers or by consumer advocates like Fomca etc?

Darshan:

Well, the teachers should take the lead in teaching consumerism in schools. We can share the necessary knowledge and the non governmental organisations can be invited to give talks periodically. NGOs like us deal with people on a daily basis and we know the state of the Malaysian consumers.

Q:

Should consumerism as a subject be taught both at primary and secondary schools, followed by in colleges and universities?

Darshan:

NCCC feels the subject of consumerism should start from secondary schools onwards. A student must be able to grasp consumer issues well and I think a student would be ready for that from secondary level and above. Everyone must understand that the power is in the hands of the consumer.

We must have solidarity, and we must act as one whenever anyone of is shortchanged. If need be, boycott a store that fleeces consumers and tell others to do so too. We live in an open market economy. One day we must do away with the price control mechanism and preparation must start now. There is a lot of work to do.

Q:

Should consumerism be taught as a subject by itself or can it be incorporated into the existing curriculum?

Darshan:

It can be incorporated into the existing curriculum. We do not have to create a another subject

Bernama : Produce Savvy Consumers From Young

Written by Administrator

Monday, 14 September 2009 17:24 -

as such. The best option should be explored by the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs.

Attention should also be given to revive and strengthen consumer clubs in schools. These clubs could later get involved in programmes organised in their respective areas, an experience which will give students first hand knowledge in dealing with consumer issues. This is where organisations like Fomca (Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations), NCCC and others can play a role. Interest must be generated among students as it is very unfortunate if they become members of these clubs solely for testimonial purposes only. They must be directly involved and we can provide the guidance and assistance.

If our consumers are well educated, then the businesses will operate more ethically as they will be aware that it will be impossible to shortchange a savvy consumer.

-- BERNAMA

by Jeswan Kaur