

**KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 2 (Bernama) --** The best way to identify a problem faced by the consumers is through the complaints that they lodge with the National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC).

But getting people to file in their complaints with NCCC is no easy task.

According to NCCC's Director, Darshan Singh, to achieve the best results, consumers must unite and fight for their rights if it is violated.

"We must voice out our concerns. For example, two issues, which have caught our attention and warranted our serious efforts in advocacy, the scratch and win scams and the unsolicited SMS scam."

"We can only do effective work when consumers file complaints with us. With this we can see pro-active actions taken by relevant parties. Without public grievances, the regulators or enforcement agencies would ignore the issue," he told Bernama.

The government banned the scratch and win contests in early December last year.

**INCREASE AWARENESS**

Since established in mid-2004, NCCC has seen a steady rise in the number of complaints received.

According to Darshan, corporations have also begun to recognise NCCC's existence and the services offered.

More corporations now respond quickly to complaints forwarded to them for solutions.

"Regulators and enforcement agencies are beginning to work closely with the NCCC. This is what we set out to achieve. Currently almost 70 percent of complaints are resolved at the NCCC level. Ultimately we want to see all parties living in harmony."

"While consumers get the best deals, corporations should also register healthy profits and enforcement units should also work to wipe out errant businesses," he added.

Darshan stressed that corporations should also develop effective complaints handling mechanism within their organisations so that consumer grievances could be handled effectively within the shortest possible time.

"It must be a win-win situation for all," he said.

**GUIDE CONSUMERS**

At the same time, Darshan said NCCC would continue with its efforts to train consumers on the know-how in seeking redress.

font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> "What we have done is to guide consumers to write to the relevant agencies and forward a copy to us for records. We need these complaints to effectively identify issues," he explained.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> At the end of the day, Darshan said consumers need to be educated so that they would not have to fully rely on any third party to act on their behalf.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> "To achieve this, it will take us some years. We have to become a developed consumer society and to achieve this education is a vital element," he opined.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> According to Darshan, the first thing need to be done is to get people interested in consumer related issues.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> ♦ This is a big challenge. Currently the majority of Malaysian consumers consider consumer issues as trivial. Most of them do not wish to highlight issues. Some are only concerned when they are directly affected and need to seek redress.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> "They fail to understand that with globalisation and economic liberalisation, we are being bombarded with all sorts of goods and services. If we do not take an effort to seek knowledge, we are bound to be shortchanged at some point of time," explained Darshan.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> <strong>RECURRING ISSUES</strong></span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> Most of the issues plaguing Malaysian consumers are recurring issues. This is the analysis made by Darshan.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> However, he opined that with all the discussions on the price of goods and services being actively debated, the cost of living would take the center stage in 2008.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> "With this we expect to register many more complaints on price increase," he added.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> At the same time, Darshan hopes the authorities concerned would take all the necessary measures in ensuring the business community does not raise prices of goods and services at their own whims and fancies.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> "Currently, the concerned ministry can only take action when traders don't display prices. There is no law against profiteering. Until today profiteering has not been defined. How much of an increase would be considered profiteering?</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> " All the ministry can do is to revoke their business license. It is therefore important for the ministry to speed up the introduction of the Fair Trade Act, which would check profiteering," urged Darshan.</span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> <strong>POWER OF CONSUMERS</strong></span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> </span><br /><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> At the end of the day the power is in the hands of consumers. If they feel

a particular establishment has unnecessarily increased the price, it is their duty to boycott them. Not stopping just there, they should also alert others against patronising such premises.

At this point of time consumers would have to work hand in glove with the Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs.

Reports must be lodged with the ministry's Enforcement Division and immediate action have to be taken by enforcement officers. Pointing fingers serves no purpose.

According to Darshan, solidarity among consumers is vital. We have always spoken about unity of races, unity of the nation and so on but we must not forget unity among consumers.

**COMPLAINTS RECEIVED**

For the first time since its inception the NCCC produced its first Annual Report, which contained a review and analysis of all consumer complaints lodged throughout 2006.

A total of 18,345 complaints were received in 2006 and for 2007, the number is expected to be about 15% higher.

NCCC has sorted the complaints in 23 categories with the most totaling 1,578 complaints in the housing category, followed by direct sales (1,499), private higher education (1,453), property management companies, telecommunications (1,297), defective products (1,032) and cheap sales (1,003).

In terms of ethnicity, Malays submitted the most complaints representing 67.7 percent (12,402), followed by Chinese 23.5 percent (4,315) and others 0.9 percent (169).

**BENEFITS OF FEEDBACK**

NCCC's Chief Executive Officer Datuk Marimuthu Nadason noted that the Annual Report would bring to the attention of the respective industry and the enforcement agencies on the problems faced by consumers.

"This feedback will in turn help industry to identify areas of consumer dissatisfaction and lead to improvements in their products and services.

Enforcement agencies on the other hand will benefit from this feedback in terms of revising policies, procedures and regulations which impact on consumers," he said in his message published in the 2006 Annual Report.

Marimuthu who is also the President of the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (FOMCA) added that the information gathered also provides FOMCA with an opportunity to advocate policy changes in the relevant areas.

(Modes of receiving complaints provided by NCCC is phone call

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Written by Administrator

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03-78748097)</span><br /></div><p class="news"><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana"> <br /> -- BERNAMA </span></p> <p class="MsoNormal"><span style="font-size: 8pt; font-family: Verdana">◆</span></p> <p> </p>