


Champion of consumers

Written by Administrator

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 Darshan attending to a complaint by a consumer at the NCCC office in Petaling Jaya. ♦

KUALA LUMPUR: As the director of the National Consumer Complaints Centre, Darshan Singh is in a position which many don't envy. The 38-year-old Kampar-born activist has made "enemies" while fighting for consumer rights. His job makes him an easy target when he approaches companies and services providers with tonnes of complaints from the public. Darshan admits that his job is not an easy one especially when consumers expect their problems to be solved when they come to him at the centre in Petaling Jaya. But Darshan has proved to be persistent, and much of his efforts since 2004 has paid off. One of his major accomplishments was getting scratch-and-win contests to be banned.

Q: Tell us about your involvement with NCCC. Where were you before this?

A: I joined the centre in 2004 after learning that there was an opening for NCCC, an affiliate of the Federation of Consumers Associations of Malaysia (Fomca). I left a merchandising company to take up the NCCC job. We started operations in January 2005. I was with the merchandising company since 1996, handling legal and corporate affairs. It served as a training ground for what I am doing now because at the NCCC, I deal a lot with people and legal matters, especially when it comes to products and services promised to the consumers. This is what I can do, and I hope to do this for years to come.

Q: Did you ever imagined you would serve the public through a consumer-related organisation?

A: I never expected to be working with an organisation like NCCC. However, come to think of it, I've always been interested in helping society. This is my way of doing it, by bringing up their grouses to the regulators and directing their complaints to the companies.

Q: Is it tough dealing with complaints every day?

A: To do something, you need to have passion. The same principle applies here; I take people's grievances as if they are my own. It's also satisfying we received e-mails, thanking us and informing that the complaints were solved. There were also situations when we got scoldings from the complainants who were frustrated that their problems were not solved. We have to be very patient when dealing with this. When I forward complaints to companies, it is very important to do a regular follow-up. What we need is not just a win-win situation, but even better, a win-win-win situation. This means, we work together with the consumers and companies as well as the regulators.

Q: How many complaints have you looked into since NCCC started its operations in 2005? Which areas received the highest number of complaints?

A: Easily 50,000 complaints, with last year being the highest recorded, around 20,000 complaints. Most of the complaints were against finance and service providers like banks and phone companies.

Q: What is your education background?

A: I had my primary education at the La Salle School in Kampar and my secondary at the Anglo-Chinese School, Kampar. I got my law degree from University of East London. I didn't complete my certificate for legal practice, though. I plan to continue and get my certificate one day.

Q: Tell us a bit about your family.

A: I'm the eldest of six and most of my siblings studied law. Malim Nawar state assemblyman Keshvinder Singh is my brother. My father, who

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owns a small business, always stresses about the importance of education. When people asked him why he didn't subscribe to insurance, he said it was better for him to entrust his money to his children. To him, that's his insurance.

Q: Do you have children? How old are they?

A: I have two boys, aged 10 and five. I always remind them the importance of helping others.

Q: Were you active in sports? What do you normally do in your free time?

A: I'm not into sports although my brothers played football in school. I was more into society works. I love reading as that is one of the sources of information for me.

Q: What do you hope to achieve one day?

A: I wish that every consumer would be a consumer activist. The day when every consumer understand his or her rights and roles in bringing up issues that affect the public. It is even easier with emails, where we can forward their complaints to companies and even bring up issues to government agencies. I hope that one day, we don't need people to come to us and lodge complaints as they can communicate directly with the relevant companies and have their complaints resolved without our intervention. Currently, I feel that we are still not ready to be self-regulatory. Government agencies need to be more stringent in monitoring these organisations, especially in enforcement, and not just policy-making.

By Nuradzimmah Daim