

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION
LOK SABHA**

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:1996

ANSWERED ON:17.12.2013

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Chaudhary Shri Haribhai Parthibhai;Chavan Shri Harischandra Deoram;Dhruvanarayana Shri R. ;Gowda Shri D.B. Chandre;Jakhar Shri Badri Ram ;Jeyadural Shri S. R.;Shankar Alias Kushal Tiwari Shri Bhisma;Tudu Shri Laxman;Vasava Shri Mansukhbhai D.;Yadav Shri M. Anjan Kumar

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

- (a) the details of the State and District Consumer Fora in the country along with the number and nature of cases registered, disposed and pending in these fora during each of the last three years and the current year, State-wise;
- (b) whether any time limit has been fixed for disposal of the pending cases and if so, the details thereof and the steps taken to ensure compliance of the said time frame;
- (c) the steps taken for strengthening of the consumer fora along with the success achieved therein during the said period;
- (d) the extent to which the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 has been effective in protecting the rights of the consumers along with the changes proposed in the law to make it more responsive to the needs of consumers in the present scenario; and
- (e) whether the Government has launched or proposes to launch consumer awareness programmes/drives to make consumers aware about their rights particularly, those belonging to socially and economically backward classes and the success achieved therein?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) FOR CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (PROF. K. V. THOMAS)

(a) : Reply is furnished in Annexure-'A' & 'B'.

(b) : As per the provisions of Section 19 of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, every complaint/appeal shall be heard as expeditiously as possible and an endeavor shall be made to finally dispose of the complaint/appeal within a period of 90/150 days from the date of its admission. However, no time limit can be fixed for disposal of pending judicial cases.

(c) : The Government have taken several steps to strengthen the Consumer Fora. There are three plan schemes in this direction namely "Strengthening Consumer Fora Phase-II", "CONFONET" and "State Consumer Helpline". Since the administration and functioning of the District Consumer Redressal Fora, State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions are within the purview of the State Governments, grants for building of District Consumer Fora, State Commission and for providing furniture, computer etc., are continuously being provided to the State Governments. NIC has been entrusted with the job of computerization of the functioning of the Consumer Fora under the scheme CONFONET. Apart from providing software and hardware, they have been training the staff for applications of computers. To help consumers lodge their complaints and to guide them in their cases, State Consumer Help Line have been set up. A one time grant as well as recurring expenses for five years towards this project are being provided to the State Governments. Mediation Centers are being set up in the States to resolve the cases through conciliation between the parties, obviating the need to file a case in the District Fora. It is aimed to reduce the volume of the cases pending in the Consumer Fora. As a result of all these initiatives undertaken by the Central Government, a lot of success have been achieved to enlighten the Consumers of their rights and allow them to reap the benefits of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

(d) : The Consumer Protection Act has been very effective since its origin. A momentum of consumer awareness has been created throughout the country and more and more consumers have been availing themselves of Consumer Disputes redressal agencies. To review its working, an evaluation study was made by the Indian Institute of Public Administration. A number of recommendations have been received aimed at its improvement.

Some provisions of the Act/Rules are proposed to be modified. The following are some of the areas where modifications will take place:

- (i) There will be provisions for opening up more Circuit Benches and Mediation Centres in the Districts;
- (ii) Complaints against defective goods and inferior services can be lodged within 30 days of receipt of goods and service;
- (iii) One or more consumers having same interest can file a complaint. The judgment given in the case will be applicable to all the consumers notwithstanding the fact that only one of the consumers lodged the complaint;
- (iv) For complaints up to one lakh, no advocate shall be allowed;
- (v) The term "unfair Contract" may be generalized;
- (vi) Power may be vested with District Fora to review their judgments.

(e) : The Publicity Division of Department of Consumer Affairs is implementing a plan scheme on Consumer Awareness namely "Jago Grahak Jago" campaign. The awareness messages released under the campaign on print and electronic media are for all categories of consumers including socially and economically backward classes.