

## TO THE RESCUE OF THE HARASSED CONSUMER

Sir, This refers to the news of the Central Government decision to set up quasi-judicial bodies at the State and Central level for redressal of consumer grievances. It is fortunate that the Government has at last come to the rescue of the harassed consumer. It has done a commendable job in passing a few bills to safeguard the welfare of the consumers. For the past few years, there was a constant demand by individual consumers and their organization for legislation to protect the interests of the consumers. The passing of the Consumer Protection Bill has not only given a good start to the consumer movement in the country but also has given confidence to consumers to voice their grievances.

One remarkable feature of the Bill is the inclusion of the public utilities under its purview. A majority of the hardships and grievances of the consumers are due to the inadequate and unsatisfactory service rendered by the public utility service. Due to the monopolistic nature of the service, the consumer is left with no alternative but to suffer. Due to the utter disregard of consumer interest by these utilities, they have lost the credibility with the consumers.

A remarkable feature of the Bill is the provision to appoint High Court and Supreme Court judges to head the consumer cells at state and central level respectively. This provision will afford adequate legal power to deal with consumer problems. One of the reasons for the slow growth of the consumer movement in India is the absence of legal power for consumer organizations. No amount of protest by the consumer organizations will surely go a long way improving the status of the consumers.

The greatest boon to the consumer is the amendment of the MRTP act which gives individual consumers the right to be heard. It is the individual consumer who needs the help of the Government in overcoming his difficulties. One only hopes that consumers will make use of the facility extended by the Government. It is now the duty of the consumers to fight for their right without fear or hesitation.

Though it is said that consumer protection cells will be setup, nothing is known about their structure, members, etc. The proposed consumer cells should give more representation to the consumers. The consumer should be able to voice his grievance. It would be better if each locality has at least one consumer, traders, local corporator and a Government representative on its board.

Exploitation of the consumer by services like transport, milk, gas and cinema needs more attention from the Government. Apart from this short-measuring and adulteration practiced by petty traders have also to be covered by these consumer protection councils. It is only consumers who can make best use of these legislations.

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