



HOME

Sunday, 20 March 2016

[SHARE MARKET](#) | [EXCHANGE RATE](#) | [TRADING](#) | [PICTURE GALLERY](#) | [ARCHIVES](#)
OBSERVER  
ONLINE

News

Editorial

Finance

Features

Political

Security

Sports

Spectrum

World

Obituaries

Junior

OTHER  
PUBLICATIONS

OTHER LINKS

## Agoda® Hotels

Up To 80% Off Hotel-Deals Worldwide Lowest-Price Guarantee, Book &amp; Save



CONSUMER RIGHTS:

### More ombudsmen, the need of the hour - Dr. Weerasooria

by Lalin Fernandopulle

Consumer rights activists said the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) Act should be amended without further delay and more ombudsmen should be appointed to ensure the welfare of consumers.

Insurance Ombudsman, Dr. Wickrema Weerasooria told a forum organised by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) last week to mark Consumer Rights Day that the CAA should be renamed as Consumer Affairs and Trade Practices Commission, like the best model in Australia and this Commission should comprise members appointed by the Constitutional Council.



In other words, to elevate consumer affairs and trade practices with subjects such as the police and fire which concerns all.

He said the CAA Act should be similar to the Trade Practices Act in Australia which revolutionised trade relating to consumer matters and trade practices. This will provide more teeth to the Commission and freedom from political interference.

He said Section 52 of the Trade Practices Act states, a company could be brought before court for misleading deceptive conduct. Similarly, Section 30 of the CAA Act categorically states a businessman or a trader can be brought before court.

It also says no trader shall in the course of trade engage in any act that is likely to deceive consumers.

The Trade Practices Act provides protection for consumers who conduct transactions with corporations and the State.

All States and Territories have mirrored many of the consumer protection provisions in the Trade Practices Act in their fair trading legislation.

A person who suffers loss or damage as a result of a breach of the consumer protection provisions of the Trade Practices Act may recover damages for that loss.

He said there should be more ombudsman schemes to ensure fair trade and justice to consumers. There should be an ombudsman for private hospitals, utility services such as water and electricity to address the grievances of consumers. They should be appointed without taxing the Consolidated Fund. Such a person is vital, to listen to the problems of consumers and mete out justice to them.

"It is women who should give leadership to consumer affairs because they understand household matters better than men," Dr. Weerasooria said.

Former CAA Chairman Sarath Wijesinghe said the CAA Act should be amended to provide proper leadership and more powers should be vested on it to be an active body to safeguard the rights and welfare of consumers.

He said consumer organisations must exert pressure on the CAA to play a more vibrant role taking a cue from consumers in the UK who brought a beverage company down to its knees for using water from River Thames.

Former US President John F. Kennedy said consumers are the most neglected sector in society.

"The consumer, though said to be a king, is often taken for a ride by suppliers.

The CAA is not active as the watchdog of consumer rights. A large volume of the water in the Kelani river, which is used for consumption, is polluted due to contamination caused by a beverage company. The sharks in the trade get away using influence but not the small polluters, Wijesinghe said. He said the world is heading for disaster due to the excessive use of antibiotics.

Unless steps are taken against this epidemic, the world will face the danger of fast reaching the post antibiotic era soon.

Around 50 percent of the antibiotics used in agriculture come to the table through supply chains. There are around 100,000 restaurants operating worldwide. Food in many of them is said to be adulterated.

"Estimates reveal that around 10 percent of the population in Sri Lanka are diabetic and the number of kidney patients is growing by 10,000 each year. We must have checks and balances in place. However, food chains will not stop producing junk food due to greed. Many Lankans are prisoners of junk food due to the use of credit cards," he said.

Executive Director, IPS, Dr. Saman Kalegama stressed the importance of safeguarding the consumer's right to safety, right to be informed, right to choose and the right to be heard which was outlined by former US President John F. Kennedy. "Consumer rights is generally about addressing the power balance between the consumer and the retailer.

"Invariably, the retailer is more informed than the consumer. Consumers must be aware of their rights and the potential for redress," Dr. Kalegama said. He said consumers cannot keep track of the manufacturing process of every item. Standardisation is needed to enable consumers gauge the quality of what they consume.