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## Consumer is No King in SL!

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The corporate cliché ‘Consumer is King’ applied world over is yet to spill into Sri Lanka with the buyer segment continuing to be largely neglected despite the efforts made by the relevant authorities to reverse the situation.

While measures have been taken to conceptualise an effective consumer policy, senior economist Dr. Saman Kelegama stressed more should be done for the group to be aware of their rights. “Communication and information go hand in hand when it comes to building a successful consumer policy. Consumers must be aware of the ‘potential force’ they represent.

The consumer must know what they are ‘fighting for’, if not they cannot ‘fight’ or rather, consume appropriately,” professed Dr. Kelegama at the World Consumer Rights Day Forum in Colombo. Pointing out it is imperative that both – the consumer and policymakers – get together to identify the issues relevant to customers in the current environment, he asserted that it was the duty of the government to ensure consumers are looked after and their interests are represented in the best possible manner. Attention was also drawn to the impossible task faced by the consumers in keeping track of the manufacturing process, to which standardisation was urged to be taken up across the board, regardless of the sector.

“Proper standardisation practices provide the consumer with a sense of security and confidence about their purchases, allowing them to make an informed choice, which is one of their basic rights,” noted the senior economist while justifying standardisation as an important mechanism that would allow consumers to gauge the quality of the product and service they purchase.

The basic rights of consumers were highlighted as: the right to safety, right to be informed, right to choose and the right to be heard. Dr. Kelegama implied that greater role must be taken up by various stakeholders to not only protect the interest of local consumers, but to also build confidence in the plethora of products and services available.

Meanwhile, Presidential Advisor, Insurance Ombudsman and Senior Lawyer Dr. Wickrama Weerasooria noted three key steps must be taken to move forward in the area of consumer rights. Whilst more ombudsmen must be created without taxing the consolidated funds, authorities must work towards the ombudsman scheme and to ensure consumers are further protected, it was suggested for the Consumer Affairs Authority (CAA) to take over the additional name of ‘Trade Practices Commission’, thus fulfilling that role.

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