

THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 1986*

No. 68 of 1986

[24th December, 1986]

An Act to provide for better protection of the interests of consumers and for that purpose to make provision for the establishment of consumer councils and other authorities for the settlement of consumers' disputes and for matters connected therewith.

Be it enacted by Parliament in the Thirty-seventh Year of the Republic of India as follows:

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY

Short title, extent, commencement and application

1. (1) This Act may be called the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

(2) It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

(3) It shall come into force on such date as the Central Government may, by notification, appoint and different dates may be appointed for different states and for different provisions of this Act.

(4) Save as otherwise expressly provided by the Central Government by notification, this Act shall apply to all goods and services.

Definitions

2. (1) In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

- (a) "appropriate laboratory" means a laboratory or organisation recognised by the Central Government and includes any such laboratory or organisation established by or under any law for the time being in force, which is maintained, financed or aided by the Central Government or a State Government for carrying out analysis or test of any goods with a view to determining whether such goods suffer from any defect:

*This Act of Parliament received the assent of the President on the 24th December, 1986, and was published for general information in Gazette of India, 26-12-1986, Part II, Section 1, Ext., p. 1 (No. 83).

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- (b) "complainant" means:
- (i) a consumer; or
 - (ii) any voluntary consumer association registered under the Companies Act, 1956 or under any other law for the time being in force; or
 - (iii) the Central Government or any State Government, who or which makes a complaint;
- (c) "complaint" means any allegation in writing made by a complainant that:
- (i) as a result of any unfair trade practice adopted by any trader, the complainant has suffered loss or damage;
 - (ii) the goods mentioned in the complaint suffer from one or more defects;
 - (iii) the services mentioned in the complaint suffer from deficiency in any respect;
 - (iv) a trader has charged for the goods mentioned in the complaint a price in excess of the price fixed by or under any law for the time being in force or displayed on the goods or any package containing such goods,

with a view to obtaining any relief provided by or under this Act;

- (d) "consumer" means any person who:
- (i) buys any goods for a consideration which has been paid or promised or partly paid and partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment and includes any user of such goods other than the person who buys such goods for consideration paid or promised or partly paid or partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment when such use is made with the approval of such person, but does not include a person who obtains such goods for resale or for any commercial purpose; or
 - (ii) hires any services for a consideration which has been paid or promised or partly paid and partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment and includes any beneficiary of such services other than the person who hires the services for consideration paid or promised, or partly

paid and partly promised, or under any system of deferred payment, when such services are availed of with the approval of the first mentioned person;

- (e) "consumer dispute" means a dispute where the person against whom a complaint has been made, denies or disputes the allegations contained in the complaint;
- (f) "defect" means any fault, imperfection or shortcoming in the quality, quantity, potency, purity or standard which is required to be maintained by or under any law for the time being in force or as is claimed by the trader in any manner whatsoever in relation to any goods;
- (g) "deficiency" means any fault, imperfection, shortcoming or inadequacy in the quality, nature and manner of performance which is required to be maintained by or under any law for the time being in force or has been undertaken to be performed by a person in pursuance of a contract or otherwise in relation to any service;
- (h) "District Forum" means a Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum established under clause (a) of section 9;
- (i) "goods" means goods as defined in the Sale of Goods Act, 1930;
- (j) "manufacturer" means a person who:
 - (i) makes or manufactures any goods or parts thereof; or
 - (ii) does not make or manufacture any goods but assembles parts thereof made or manufactured by others and claims the end-product to be goods manufactured by himself; or
 - (iii) puts or causes to be put his own mark on any goods made or manufactured by any other manufacturer and claims such goods to be goods made or manufactured by himself.

Explanation.—Where a manufacturer despatches any goods or part thereof to any branch office maintained by him, such branch office shall not be deemed to be the manufacturer even though the parts so despatched to it are assembled at such branch office and are sold or distributed from such branch office;

- (k) "National Commission" means the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission established under clause (c) of section 9;
- (l) "notification" means a notification published in the Official Gazette;

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- (m) "person" includes:
 - (i) a firm whether registered or not;
 - (ii) a Hindu undivided family;
 - (iii) a co-operative society;
 - (iv) every other association of persons whether registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 or not;
- (n) "prescribed" means prescribed by rules made by the State Government, or as the case may be, by the Central Government under this Act;
- (o) "service" means service of any description which is made available to potential users and includes the provision of facilities in connection with banking, financing, insurance, transport, processing, supply of electrical or other energy, board or lodging or both, entertainment, amusement or the purveying of news or other information, but does not include the rendering of any service free of charge or under a contract of personal service;
- (p) "State Commission" means a Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission established in the State under clause (b) of section 9;
- (q) "trader" in relation to any goods means a person who sells or distributes any goods for sale and includes the manufacturer thereof, and where such goods are sold or distributed in package form, includes the packer thereof;
- (r) the expression "unfair trade practice" shall have the same meaning as in section 36A of the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969, but shall not include an unfair trade practice adopted by the owner of an undertaking to which Part A of Chapter III of that Act applies or by any person acting on behalf of, or for the benefit of, such owner.

(2) Any reference in this Act to any other Act or provision thereof which is not in force in any area to which this Act applies shall be construed to have a reference to the corresponding Act or provision thereof in force in such area.

Act not in derogation of any other law

3. The provisions of this Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of the provisions of any other law for the time being in force.

CHAPTER II

CONSUMER PROTECTION COUNCILS

The Central Consumer Protection Council

4. (1) The Central Government may, by notification, establish with effect from such date as it may specify in such notification, a Council to be known as the Central Consumer Protection Council (hereinafter referred to as the Central Council).

(2) The Central Council shall consist of the following members, namely:

- (a) the Minister in charge of the Department of Food and Civil Supplies in the Central Government, who shall be its Chairman, and
- (b) such number of other official or non-official members representing such interests as may be prescribed.

Procedure for meetings of the Central Council

5. (1) The Central Council shall meet as and when necessary, but not less than three meetings of the Council shall be held every year.

(2) The Central Council shall meet at such time and place as the Chairman may think fit and shall observe such procedure in regard to the transaction of its business as may be prescribed.

Objects of the Central Council

6. The objects of the Central Council shall be to promote and protect the rights of the consumers such as:

- (a) the right to be protected against the marketing of goods which are hazardous to life and property;
- (b) the right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods so as to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices;
- (c) the right to be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of goods at competitive prices;
- (d) the right to be heard and to be assured that consumers' interests will receive due consideration at appropriate forums;
- (e) the right to seek redressal against unfair trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers; and
- (f) the right to consumer education.

The State Consumer Protection Councils

7. (1) The State Government may, by notification, establish with

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effect from such date as it may specify in such notification, a Council to be known as the Consumer Protection Council for..... (hereinafter referred to as the State Council).

(2) The State Council shall consist of such number of members as may be specified by the State Government by notification from time to time.

Objects of the State Council

8. The objects of every State Council shall be to promote and protect within the State the rights of the consumers laid down in clauses (a) to (f) of section 6.

CHAPTER III

CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL AGENCIES

Establishment of Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies

9. There shall be established for the purposes of this Act, the following agencies, namely:

- (a) a Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum to be known as the "District Forum" established by the State Government with the prior approval of the Central Government in each district of the State by notification;
- (b) a Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission to be known as the "State Commission" established by the State Government with the prior approval of the Central Government in the State by notification; and
- (c) a National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission established by the Central Government by notification.

Composition of the District Forum

10. (1) Each District Forum shall consist of:

- (a) a person who is, or has been, or is qualified to be a District Judge to be nominated by the State Government, to be its President;
- (b) a person of eminence in the field of education, trade or commerce;
- (c) a lady social worker.

(2) Every member of the District Forum shall hold office for a term of five years or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier, and shall not be eligible for re-appointment:

Provided that a member may resign his office in writing under his hand addressed to the State Government and on such resignation being accepted, his office shall become vacant and may be filled by the appointment of a person possessing any of the qualifications mentioned in subsection (1) in relation to the category of the member who has resigned.

(3) The salary or honorarium and other allowance payable to, and the other terms and conditions of service of the members of the District Forum shall be such as may be prescribed by the State Government.

Jurisdiction of the District Forum

11. (1) Subject to the other provisions of this Act, the District Forum shall have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of the goods or services and the compensation, if any, claimed is less than rupees one lakh.

(2) A complaint shall be instituted in a District Forum within the local limits of whose jurisdiction:

- (a) the opposite party or each of the opposite parties, where there are more than one, at the time of the institution of the complaint, actually and voluntarily resides or carries on business, or personally works for gain, or
- (b) any of the opposite parties, where there are more than one, at the time of the institution of the complaint, actually and voluntarily resides, or carries on business, or personally works for gain, provided that in such case either the permission of the District Forum is given, or the opposite parties who do not reside, or carry on business, or personally work for gain, as the case may be, acquiesce in such institution; or
- (c) the cause of action, wholly or in part, arises.

Manner in which complaint shall be made

12. A complaint, in relation to any goods sold or delivered or any service provided, may be filed with a District Forum by:

- (a) the consumer to whom such goods are sold or delivered or such service provided:
- (b) any recognised consumer association, whether the consumer to whom the goods sold or delivered or service provided is a member of such association or not; or
- (c) the Central or the State Government.

Explanation.—For the purpose of this section “recognised consumer association” means any voluntary consumer association registered under the Companies Act, 1956 or any other law for the time being in force.

Procedure on receipt of complaint

13. (1) The District Forum shall, on receipt of a complaint, if it relates to any goods:

- (a) refer a copy of the complaint to the opposite party mentioned in the complaint directing him to give his version of the case within a period of thirty days or such extended period not exceeding fifteen days as may be granted by the District Forum;
- (b) where the opposite party on receipt of a complaint referred to him under clause (a) denies or disputes the allegations contained in the complaint, or omits or fails to take any action to represent his case within the time given by the District Forum, the District Forum shall proceed to settle the consumer dispute in the manner specified in clause (c) to (g);
- (c) where the complaint alleges a defect in the goods which cannot be determined without proper analysis or test of the goods, the District Forum shall obtain a sample of the goods from the complainant, seal it and authenticate it in the manner prescribed and refer the sample so sealed to the appropriate laboratory along with a direction that such laboratory make an analysis or test, whichever may be necessary, with a view to finding out whether such goods suffer from any defect alleged in the complaint or suffer from any other defect and to report its findings thereon to the District Forum within a period of forty-five days of the receipt of the reference or within such extended period as may be granted by the District Forum;
- (d) before any sample of the goods is referred to any appropriate laboratory under clause (c), the District Forum may require the complainant to deposit to the credit of the Forum such fees as may be specified, for payment to the appropriate laboratory for carrying out the necessary analysis or test in relation to the goods in question;
- (e) the District Forum shall remit the amount deposited to its credit under clause (d) to the appropriate laboratory to enable it to carry out the analysis or test mentioned in clause (c) and on receipt of the report from the appropriate laboratory, the District Forum shall forward a copy of the report along with such remarks as the District Forum may feel appropriate to the opposite party;
- (f) if any of the parties disputes the correctness of the findings of the appropriate laboratory, or disputes the correctness of the methods of analysis or test adopted by the appropriate labo-

ratory, the District Forum shall require the opposite party or the complainant to submit in writing his objections in regard to the report made by the appropriate laboratory;

- (g) the District Forum shall thereafter give a reasonable opportunity to the complainant as well as the opposite party of being heard as to the correctness or otherwise of the report made by the appropriate laboratory and also as to the objection made in relation thereto under clause (f) and issue an appropriate order under section 14.

(2) The District Forum shall, if the complaint received by it under section 12 relates to goods in respect of which the procedure specified in sub-section (1) cannot be followed, or if the complaint relates to any services:

- (a) refer a copy of such complaint to the opposite party directing him to give his version of the case within a period of thirty days or such extended period not exceeding fifteen days as may be granted by the District Forum;
- (b) where the opposite party, on receipt of a copy of the complaint, referred to him under clause (a) denies or disputes the allegations contained in the complaint, or omits or fails to take any action to represent his case within the time given by the District Forum, the District Forum shall proceed to settle the consumer dispute:
 - (i) on the basis of evidence brought to its notice by the complainant and the opposite party, where the opposite party denies or disputes the allegations contained in the complaint, or
 - (ii) on the basis of evidence brought to its notice by the complainant where the opposite party omits or fails to take any action to represent his case within the time given by the Forum.

(3) No proceedings complying with the procedure laid down in sub-sections (1) and (2) shall be called in question in any court on the ground that the principles of natural justice have not been complied with.

(4) For the purposes of this section, the District Forum shall have the same powers as are vested in a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 while trying a suit in respect of the following matters, namely:

- (i) the summoning and enforcing the attendance of any defendant or witness and examining the witness on oath;

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- (ii) the discovery and production of any document or other material object producible as evidence;
- (iii) the reception of evidence on affidavits;
- (iv) the requisitioning of the report of the concerned analysis or test from the appropriate laboratory or from any other relevant source;
- (v) issuing of any commission for the examination of any witness; and
- (vi) any other matter which may be prescribed.

(5) Every proceeding before the District Forum shall be deemed to be a judicial proceeding within the meaning of sections 193 and 228 of the Indian Penal Code, and the District Forum shall be deemed to be a civil court for the purposes of section 195, and Chapter XXVI of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973.

Finding of the District Forum

14. (1) If, after the proceeding conducted under section 13, the District Forum is satisfied that the goods complained against suffer from any of the defects specified in the complaint or that any of the allegations contained in the complaint about the services are proved, it shall issue an order to the opposite party directing him to take one or more of the following things, namely:

- (a) to remove the defect pointed out by the appropriate laboratory from the goods in question;
- (b) to replace the goods with new goods of similar description which shall be free from any defect;
- (c) to return to the complainant the price, or, as the case may be, the charges paid by the complainant;
- (d) to pay such amount as may be awarded by it as compensation to the consumer for any loss or injury suffered by the consumer due to the negligence of the opposite party.

(2) Every order made by the District Forum under sub-section (1) shall be signed by all the members constituting it and, if there is any difference of opinion, the order of the majority of the members constituting it shall be the order of the District Forum.

(3) Subject to the foregoing provisions, the procedure relating to the conduct of the meetings of the District Forum, its sitting and other matters shall be such as may be prescribed by the State Government.

Appeal

15. Any person aggrieved by an order made by the District Forum may prefer an appeal against such order to the State Commission within a period of thirty days from the date of the order, in such form and manner as may be prescribed;

Provided that the State Commission may entertain an appeal after the expiry of the said period of thirty days if it is satisfied that there was sufficient cause for not filing it within that period.

Composition of the State Commission

16. (1) Each State Commission shall consist of:

- (a) a person who is or has been a Judge of a High Court, appointed by the State Government, who shall be its President;
- (b) two other members, who shall be persons of ability, integrity and standing and have adequate knowledge or experience of, or have shown capacity in dealing with, problems relating to economics, law, commerce, accountancy, industry, public affairs or administration, one of whom shall be a woman:

Provided that no sitting Judge of a High Court shall be appointed under this sub-section except after consultation with the Chief Justice of that High Court.

(2) The salary or honorarium and other allowances payable to, and the other terms and conditions of service (including tenure of office) of, the members of the State Commission shall be such as may be prescribed by the State Government.

Jurisdiction of the State Commission

17. Subject to the other provisions of this Act, the State Commission shall have jurisdiction:

- (a) to entertain:
 - (i) complaints where the value of the goods or services and compensation, if any, claimed exceeds rupees one lakh but does not exceed rupees ten lakhs; and
 - (ii) appeals against the orders of any District Forum within the State; and
- (b) to call for the records and pass appropriate orders in any consumer dispute which is pending before or has been decided by any District Forum within the State, where it appears to the State Commission that such District Forum has exercised a jurisdiction not vested in it by law, or has failed to exercise a

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jurisdiction so vested or has acted in exercise of its jurisdiction illegally or with material irregularity.

Procedure applicable to State Commissions

18. The procedure specified in sections 12, 13 and 14 and under the rules made thereunder for the disposal of complaints by the District Forum shall, with such modifications as may be necessary, be applicable to the disposal of disputes by the State Commission.

Appeals

19. Any person aggrieved by an order made by the State Commission in exercise of its powers conferred by sub-clause (i) of clause (a) of section 17 may prefer an appeal against such order to the National Commission within a period of thirty days from the date of the order in such form and manner as may be prescribed;

Provided that the National Commission may entertain an appeal after the expiry of the said period of thirty days if it is satisfied that there was sufficient cause for not filing it within that period.

Composition of the National Commission

20. (1) The National Commission shall consist of:

- (a) a person who is or has been a Judge of the Supreme Court, to be appointed by the Central Government, who shall be its President;
- (b) four other members who shall be persons of ability, integrity and standing and have adequate knowledge or experience of, or have shown capacity in dealing with, problems relating to economics, law, commerce, accountancy, industry, public affairs or administration, one of whom shall be a woman:

Provided that no sitting Judge of the Supreme Court shall be appointed under this sub-section except after consultation with the Chief Justice of that Court.

(2) The salary or honorarium and other allowances payable to and the other terms and conditions of service (including tenure of office) of the members of the National Commission shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

Jurisdiction of the National Commission

21. Subject to the other provisions of this Act, the National Commission shall have jurisdiction:

- (a) to entertain:
 - (i) complaints where the value of the goods or services and compensation, if any, claimed exceeds rupees ten lakhs; and
 - (ii) appeals against the orders of any State Commission; and
- (b) to call for the records and pass appropriate orders in any consumer dispute which is pending before or has been decided by any State Commission where it appears to the National Commission that such State Commission has exercised a jurisdiction not vested in it by law, or has failed to exercise a jurisdiction so vested, or has acted in the exercise of its jurisdiction illegally or with material irregularity.

Procedure applicable to the National Commission

22. The National Commission shall, in the disposal of any complaints or of any proceedings before it, have the powers of a civil court as specified in sub-sections (4) and (5) of section 13 and follow such procedure as may be prescribed by the Central Government.

Appeal

23. Any person, aggrieved by an order made by the National Commission in exercise of its powers conferred by sub-clause (i) of clause (a) of section 21, may prefer an appeal against such order to the Supreme Court within a period of thirty days from the date of the order.

Provided that the Supreme Court may entertain an appeal after the expiry of the said period of thirty days if it is satisfied that there was sufficient cause for not filing it within that period.

Finality of orders

24. Every order of a District Forum, State Commission or the National Commission shall, if no appeal has been preferred against such order under the provisions of this Act, be final.

Enforcement of orders by the Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission

25. Every order made by the District Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission may be enforced by the District Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission, as the case may be, in the same manner as if it were a decree or order made by a court in a suit pending therein and it shall be lawful for the District Forum, the

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State Commission or the National Commission to send, in the event of its inability to execute it, such order to the court within the local limits of whose jurisdiction:

- (a) in the case of an order against a company, the registered office of the company is situated, or
- (b) in the case of an order against any other person, the place where the person concerned voluntarily resides or carries on business or personally works for gain, is situated,

and thereupon, the court to which the order is so sent, shall execute the order as if it were a decree or order sent to it for execution.

Dismissal of frivolous or vexatious complaints

26. Where a complaint instituted is found to be frivolous or vexatious, the District Forum, the State Commission or, as the case may be, the National Commission, may dismiss the complaint.

Penalties

27. Where a trader or a person against whom a complaint made fails or omits to comply with any order made by the District Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission, as the case may be, such trader or person shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than one month but which may extend to three years, or with fine which shall not be less than two thousand rupees but which may extend to ten thousand rupees, or with both:

Provided that the District Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission, as the case may be, may, if it is satisfied that the circumstances of any case so require, impose a sentence of imprisonment or fine, or both, for a term lesser than the minimum term and the amount lesser than the minimum amount, specified in this section.

CHAPTER IV

MISCELLANEOUS

Protection of action taken in good faith

28. No suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against the members of the District Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission or any officer or person acting under the direction of the District Forum, the State Commission or the National Commission for executing any order made by it or in respect of anything which is in