

'Tougher law to protect buyers'

Modi: Authority to redress complaints fast, stricter norms to nip misleading ads soon

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday announced that the Government is working on a new consumer protection law with stricter guidelines on advertisements to ensure that people are not misled. A Central Consumer Protection Authority with executive powers will be constituted for quick remedial action, he said.

The new law that will replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 will instead incorporate the revised 2015 United Nations guidelines on consumer protection.

Modi was addressing the International Conference on Consumer Protection for East, South and South-east countries. "Today we are in the process of enacting a new consumer protection Act keeping in view the business practices and the requirements of the

country. The proposed Act lays great emphasis on consumer empowerment," he said, adding, "Rules are being simplified to ensure that consumer grievances are redressed in a time-bound manner and at least possible cost."

"Protection of consumer interests is a priority of the Government. This is also reflected in our resolution of the New India. Moving beyond consumer protection, New India will have the best consumer practices and consumer prosperity," Modi said.

Consumer protection was among the Government's key priorities, he said, noting that it recently brought out the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which is bringing in a new business culture across the country.

"In the long term, GST will only benefit consumers. They will not be cheated as they become more aware of this law."

Consumers could now see on receipts the tax they are paying to the Centre and the States. GST would encourage competition among companies that would result in fall in

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prices of goods, benefiting the poor and middle class consumers.

The time reduction in the transportation of goods would also lead to fall in prices and this benefit would also be transferred to the consumers. "Due to GST, various indirect and hidden taxes have ceased to exist. The biggest beneficiaries of GST will be the consumers, the middle class," he said.

Inflation had been brought down significantly in the last three years and this had helped in consumer saving.

He also pointed to the new Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA) meant to protect home buyers' interests. "Earlier, consumers waited for years to get the possession of their homes as they would fall prey to unscrupulous builders. There used to be ambiguity regarding the area of the flat. Now after RERA, only registered developers can seek bookings and only after getting all the required permissions," he said.

Modi said a buyer could book a flat with 10 per cent booking amount from the earlier up to 40 per cent. The developer would not be able to divert fund as 70 per cent of the money had to be kept in an escrow account.

Similarly, the Bureau of Indian Standards Act has also been enacted. Now any commodity or service related to public or consumer interests can

be brought under compulsory certification. This Act also has provisions to order recall of sub-standard products from the market and for compensation in case of loss or damages incurred by the consumer.

On Aadhaar, Modi said that Aadhaar card will be hugely beneficial to citizens of the country. He further asserted that Aadhaar scheme implementation will be a gain for everybody as Aadhaar card maintains equality and allocates grants/subsidies to every citizen without being partial.

Prime Minister's assurance comes on the heels of the Centre's decision to extend the deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar to avail benefits of various Government schemes till March 31 next year.

While talking about various sectoral initiatives, he mentioned the importance of good governance, Jandhan Yojna, Make in India programme, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and provision of free LPG to the poorer sections of society, technology-driven PDS system and Aadhaar-based transparency system, etc that have protected consumer interests and how consumers are benefited and their hard-earned money saved.

On the digital front, he said efforts are on to ensure that at least one member in a rural family gets digitally educated so that the rural population can derive benefits from various Government schemes and are able to use UPI, BHIM etc.