Consumer protection law

Legal fraternity demands effective implementation

Staff Report

ISLAMABAD: In order to give another push to activate the dormant Islamabad Consumer Protection Act 1995, TheNetwork for Consumer Protection gathered Islamabad's legal fraternity including member of district judiciary in a training workshop on 'Consumer Protection and Energy Sector Laws'.

Funded by USAID, the workshop has the aim of orientation of lawyers on the city's 17-year-old Consumer Protection Law making it more proactive in providing relief and redress to consumers of the capital city.

The workshop has a specific focus on energy sector laws and regulations as in the recent past the twin cities have experienced violent electricity protests taking the public life to a standstill. Thousands of people suffered during those protests.

The workshop has full cooperation of Islamabad High Court Chief Justice Iqbal Hameed ur Rahman, who nominated additional district and sessions judge to attend the workshop.

In his presentation of the participants, Islamabad District Court Additional and Session Judge of Kamran Basharat Mufti said that the Consumer Protection Law of Islamabad needed to be seen as a whole. It also requires an active Consumer Protection Council mainly consisting of bureaucrats and eminent people from the capital and the associations of consumers. The litigation in the Consumer Court is only done after exhausting all these forums. But he lamented that in Islamabad there is no Consumer Council as per law. "Until and unless the Islamabad Consumer Protection Council is formed the Consumer Courts cannot provide redress effectively to the Consumers under the Islamabad Consumer Protection Act 1995."

He also stressed upon the need for the formation of a Consumer Watchdog Association in Islamabad Capital Territory to safeguard the consumer rights of the citizens.

TheNetwork for Consumer Protection Executive Coordinator Nadeem Iqbal briefed the participants about the nature of three types of regulations- self, co and third party- to make the consumer redress framework more effective in consumer sector. He said that National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) and Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority laws provide for the effective contribution of consumers in the open hearings for price determination of the tariff but the consumer representation is negligible.

"Last month TheNetwork intervened on behalf of consumers in NEPRA's public hearing that instead of shifting load of inefficiency to consumers the IESCO should improve its efficiency. TheNetwork has a very positive response from the NEPRA," Nadeem added.

As many as 20 participants from Islamabad district courts participated in the day-long training workshop which familiarised them with the consumer protection laws and the mechanism to enforce them.

The participants were given orientation on the concept of Consumer Protection and Consumer Protection Legislation in Pakistan. Also a detailed session was dedicated to the Islamabad Consumer Protection Act 1995 and the relevant energy sector regulations. A mock trial also took place among the participant headed by the additional and sessions judge.

Participants of the workshop resolved to effectively implement the Islamabad Consumer Protection Act 1995. The participants vowed, that, they would be the torch-bearers to spread the awareness and understanding of the consumer protection legislation among their clients and the society in general.

Towards the end of the training the participants exhibited strong understanding of the consumer protection laws. An Energy Lawyers Association was formed among the participants to provide a well conversant platform for the consumers for the efficient and effective grievance redressal.

TheNetwork has since taken the lead in creating awareness of the consumer protection rights and the implementation of the laws and has managed to create a hub of resource persons in this sector to effectively implement the laws through conducting training of the concerned stakeholders.