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consumer who filed the complaint. In this way, we have awarded Tk 2,108,525 to complainants in the last year and a half.

*Experts had expressed concern about the weakness and loopholes of CRPA, 2009 as soon as it was enacted. Do you feel that those loopholes have been affecting your activities to protect consumers' rights?*

There are some criticisms about the law. For instance, section 60 of the law states that a consumer has to file complaint within 30 days of the cause of action of any anti-consumer rights practices. The aggrieved party cannot appeal against our verdict. If an aggrieved consumer wants to go to the court, s/he has to do so through our officials. If our designated official thinks that the case cannot be solved within our scope of work, s/he can forward it before the court of the chief metropolitan magistrate. Again, our officials can only fine the offenders, although sometimes, we find cases where offenders deserve harsher punishments than financial penalty. We have already prepared a draft of the proposed reformations of the existing act. We have included a provision which would enable the aggrieved parties to appeal against our verdict. So far, we have not received any case which had to be forwarded to the court of the metropolitan magistrate. All the complainants were satisfied with our investigation and our verdict. We maintain utmost transparency in these procedures. We are expecting that our proposed reformations will be accepted soon by the government. Once it is accepted, our scope of work will increase and consumers will be empowered.

*Vendors have been objecting that your officials are not trained enough to detect adulterated goods and they often fine vendors arbitrarily. What is your comment on that?*

officials penalise companies and vendors for violations which are explicit and can be seen with an unaided eye. For instance, we found many pharmacies and super-shops who have been selling date-expired medicines and cosmetic and toiletry products. We found dirty storerooms and kitchens in restaurants and food factories where foods and raw materials are left uncovered. We found how renowned retail shops and clothing brands illegally increase prices of their products to make extra profit during Ramadan. You don't need laboratories to detect these illegal practices.

*Do you have the technical capacity to detect goods which are adulterated using banned chemicals such as formalin and carbide?*

When we seize such goods, we send them to BSTI and BCSIR laboratories for further testing. Based on their reports, we take action. This takes time and we have to spend a lot of money on these tests. This is why we have already taken steps to establish a laboratory of our own where we will be able to detect the presence of harmful chemicals. We expect to be able to launch our laboratory within two years.

*Do you feel pressure from the top brass to soften your operations, as we have seen recently that one of your officials was transferred after fining some high-profile brands?*

We don't feel any pressure at all. I have given full independence to my officials as long as they act according to the law. I always stand with them for their lawful actions. I have said several times that if I don't enjoy independence to enforce the law, I shall quit from this post. A transfer is actually a regular practice in government service. If someone is transferred that does not mean he is being punished, it means his service is required more elsewhere. However, as the guardian of all the government employees, honourable Prime Minister felt that our official, Manzur Moham-

*Due to a stay order from the high court, you are not handling any complaint against the mobile phone operators at present. Will you explain what happened and what you are doing to solve this situation?*

After investigating complaints filed by three subscribers of Robi Axiata Limited, we fined the company for deceiving their customers. After paying the fine, Robi filed a written petition before the high court claiming that CRPA, 2009 cannot be applied against the telecom companies. Based on that petition, the honourable court stayed the section 70 of the CRPA, 2009 for all the telecom companies. Following the high court order, we are not investigating complaints against the telecom operators currently. However, we are receiving complaints regularly against the telecom companies. Already, more than 2,000 of such complaints have been received by our office. According to the instructions from the high court, we are formulating a guideline under section 70 of the CRPA, 2009 explaining why the law is also applicable for telecom companies. We shall soon submit the guidelines before the high court and seek permission to continue our operations.

*What are your challenges and future plans to overcome these challenges?*

Limited manpower and budget shortage are the biggest challenges for us. We don't have any official in 18 districts. With only five officials in Dhaka, we can conduct at most five raids in Dhaka city daily which I don't think is enough for such a large city full of markets and consumers. In the rest of the districts, we have only one officer and one office assistant. When they both go to monitor markets, people think that our office is closed and they cannot file complaints. Our budget is also very limited. We don't have any office of our own. In this rented office, we cannot offer proper seating arrangements to our complainants, particularly during hearings and awareness



On most occasions DNCRP Officials penalise companies and vendors for violations which are explicit and can be seen with an unaided eye.

Before recruiting our officials, we give them intense foundational training. So, this claim is not true at all. Besides these, when required, we take officials from the agriculture department, food department and scientific officers from Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI) who help us to detect adulterated goods. For instance, during our raids on the kitchen markets, we take district fisheries and livestock officers with us who help us to detect stale fish and diseased cattle. I would like to say in this regard that on most occasions, our



In the last ten years, DNCRP has fined 62,218 companies for violating consumer rights.

mad Shahriar's service is more required in DNCRP. This is why she instructed us to cancel his transfer. In fact, people are welcoming our activities. Their engagement with us has been increased many folds in the last three years. Businessmen are also happy with our operations because we are facilitating the creation of a healthy and transparent market. Since Ramadan, we have already doubled our market monitoring raids. We used to launch two such raids daily, now we shall launch five raids regularly in Dhaka.

raising programs. We need to organise awareness raising programs and publish advertisements on print and electronic media to reach out to more people.

Currently, we are operating only at the district level. But we are planning to launch our offices at the upazila and union level in the future. If we get funds, we want to publish regular advertisements in print and electronic media and also form a social media team so that people can know about their rights, learn more about us and easily get in touch.