

The CCAA's sector-specific advocacy

Taking its message to automobile workshops and doma sellers.

On May 12, two dozen automobile repair shop owners gathered for a session organized by the Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (CCAA). The complaints that had prompted the meeting were familiar enough: cars spending weeks in workshops only to break down again; spare parts of questionable origin fitted at premium prices; bills arriving with neither warning nor explanation. 17 repair service providers attended, alongside the president and executive secretary of the Automobile Service Association of Bhutan (ASAB).

The session covered fair pricing, warranty obligations, the use of genuine parts, and the basic professional courtesy of informing a customer when their car will not be ready as promised. The centerpiece, though, was a more structural recommendation: the Job Card. Before any repair begins, a workshop would record the work requested, provide a written cost estimate, and obtain the customer's authorization. The concept is hardly revolutionary - most automobile workshops elsewhere operate on some version of it - but its adoption in Bhutan has been uneven. A Job Card protects the repair shop as much as the customer. It is a paper trail that pre-empts disputes and builds the kind of trust that keeps customers returning. Participants were also given the floor to raise difficulties of their own, which the CCAA promised to carry to the relevant government agencies.

On May 13, the CCAA turned to a rather different matter: *doma*.

Doma occupies a particular place in Bhutanese life - offered at gatherings as a gesture of hospitality, chewed as a matter of daily habit, consumed regularly by much of the elderly population and many others besides. For a large number of households, its price is anything but an abstraction.

Which is what made the CCAA's recent findings hard to set aside. Toward the end of April, wholesale prices for areca nut and betel leaf had fallen by as much as 15 to 20 percent. Retail prices of *doma*, however, moved in the opposite direction, rising between 4 and 6 percent over the same period. 28 wholesalers and retailers of Thimphu came to hear the numbers laid out plainly: consumers were not seeing any benefit from lower input costs.

What surfaced in the discussion was, in some ways, more telling than the figures themselves. Many retailers admitted they had long assumed they should price in line with the prevailing market prices - not because anyone had required it, but because deviating from it felt risky. The CCAA pointed out that pricing is both their right and their responsibility. What customers pay should move with what traders actually pay for their stock, season to season. The CCAA went further, making the case that genuine market competition serves not only consumers but the traders themselves - gaining customer loyalty, driving efficiency, improving margins over time and putting their businesses on more sustainable footing.

The session was broadcast live on TikTok, drawing 188 viewers. It was a first for the CCAA, and a small but deliberate step toward meeting people where they already are.

Taken together, the two days signal a considered shift in how the CCAA does its work. Earlier awareness sessions drew businesses from across sectors for a broad survey of consumer protection law - thorough, perhaps, but rarely actionable. The new approach is sector-specific: conversations shaped around the particular pressures and practices of each trade. The frustrations aired are more relevant, the recommendations sharper, and the likelihood of follow-through - by businesses, by the CCAA, and by other government agencies - meaningfully higher.