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Consumer Council of Fiji



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PRESS RELEASE

Scammers Exposed; Consumers Urged to be Cautious

Consumers are urged to exercise extreme vigilance when dealing with certain individuals/traders operating via social media platforms. This alert comes in light of numerous complaints and social media tip-offs whereby, in a classic case of smoke and mirrors, customers paid these individuals for their services, only to be met with deceit and disappointment.

The Council has received complaints against an individual operating on social media as 'Hair & Makeup Artist Fiji – Sha' and 'Elite Wedding & Event's Fiji.' Consumers have reported that the individual operating these pages solicits payments for bridal makeup, makeup services, or event setup and decoration, but subsequently vanishes after receiving deposits ranging from \$400 to \$600. The said individual was previously operating as 'Golden events' which also practiced similar unscrupulous practices.

Another trader that has caused concern is 'Unique Styles Fiji,' an online shopping page, operational on Instagram and TikTok. This trader purchases items from off-shore shopping platforms and re-sells them to Fijian consumers. However, consumers report that the purchased items never reach them on time. Due to these delays, individuals are left with no option but to seek a refund, only to be met with more delays in receiving the money that they are rightfully entitled to. In one instance, a customer paid \$80 for two smart watches in May 2022 and had to wait an entire year before he was given a refund.

Similarly, consumers are being alerted against engaging with 'Rohini Online Fashions,' based out of Lautoka, purporting to retail ladies' Indian attire. The Council has received an astonishing 36 complaints against this individual in the last 11 months for taking hundreds of dollars from consumers but failing to supply goods; often using delaying tactics.

In relation to hardware products, 'Express Hardware Wholesalers' has also been accused of taking thousands of dollars from unsuspecting consumers for the supply of hardware materials but failing to deliver the same.

Complaints have also been registered against a driving instructor who advertises his services on social media using the aliases 'Hemant's Driving School,' 'Hamen Driving School,' and 'Sandeep Reddy Driving School,' having accumulated 6 complaints against him. Complainants

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allege that this person presents himself as a driving instructor and accepts payment for driving classes. However, once the payment is made, he fails to deliver the promised driving lessons or provide a refund to his customers.

“It is deeply concerning to see that these dodgy dealers are on the rise; looting consumers in broad daylight and in the process, diminishing trust in other entrepreneurs who operate similar businesses ethically. In response to the increasing number of complaints and to protect consumers and respective industries as a whole, we are now raising alerts by naming scammers publicly so that people are aware of whom to look out for. We are urging consumers to take heed of all advisories being given by the Council in order to stay abreast of dodgy scammers in the marketplace,” says Consumer Council CEO Seema Shandil.

The Consumer Council advises consumers to exercise caution when engaging in financial transactions and in case of any suspicious or fraudulent activities, consumers are encouraged to report such incidents to the Consumer Council promptly by dialling the toll-free number 155.