

Vendors Bill to roll out red carpet for 1 lakh more hawkers

Tough time ahead for citizens to find their feet; BMC sets up panel to chalk out practical solutions

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Imagine walking on a footpath jostling past a slew of hawkers — about 1 lakh in the city — crowding sidewalks, leaving you with little or no space to move. This could soon be the reality of your life once the draft bill of hawkers' policy is cleared.

The Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2012 will come into effect once cleared by Rajya Sabha.

Loosely put, the Bill aims to protect livelihood rights of street vendors albeit with regulations thrown in. With a valid licence, vending will be made legal. For you, this would translate into more 'licensed' hawkers down the street and your civic

body can't do a thing to evict them.

Presently, the city has between 1.5 lakh and 2 lakh hawkers, including unlicensed ones. The Act is expected to add on another 1 lakh hawkers who will spill onto the city's pavements. Estimates have it that the number of hawkers will be 2.5% of the population. Considering the latest census, which has pegged the city's populace at 1.25 crore, the city will have 3.13 lakh hawkers.

Hawkers will be able to set up shop at a place they deem is a 'natural market' — meaning where residents are at ease to shop and hawkers to do business. This could be near a hospital, school, railway or bus station or near a place of worship.

As per the new policy, the civic body is expected to regulate hawkers. So, the municipality will now have the twin task of regulating the surge of vendors while protecting public space from encroachment.

Also, every civic body will have to set up a town-vending committee which will issue licences, earmark hawking zones and manage hawk-



er movement.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation has appointed a two-member committee to study the current hawking situation and come up with solutions which can be implemented as pilot projects in the city.

These experts will conduct street

surveys and spatial studies for a holistic solution which can be implemented for the pilot projects. A work order for the study was issued last week. Dadar and Vile Parle have been earmarked as probable areas to conduct the pilot project study. Work on the survey is expected to start shortly after a meeting of civic

Nay, say civic activists

The new law has not gone down too well with activists. Aftab Siddique, a civic activist who has been fighting against illegal hawkers on Linking Road in Khar, said that there can't possibly be any agreeable solution for the citizens who will be robbed of their walking space. "For a city like Mumbai, which already has limited space and hardly any walking space, how can you expect people to agree with the new burden?" said Siddique, chairperson of 33rd Road advanced locality management in Khar. "They should first rehabilitate existing hawkers before allowing the new ones on our footpaths."

officials scheduled for next week.

The two-member committee comprises Sharit Bhowmik, professor and chairperson of Centre for Labour Studies, School of Management and Labour Studies and Rohit Shinkre, principal and professor at Rachna Sansad Academy for Architecture and a practising architect.

Sharit Bhowmik said that with the new law, hawkers are here to stay whether or not one likes it. "All existing hawkers, legal and illegal, will have to be included in the regulation exercise. The solutions will comprise all aspects well thought of," he said.

Bhowmik added that presently, more than two-thirds of footpath space and, at times, the entire footpath is occupied by hawkers. "We want this down to one-third. For this, we may need innovative solutions which will be created," he said.

Principal Shinkre said that there are various modules they will have to work on after studying hawking patterns and a host of aspects. "Our solutions should be practical and in keeping with the law," he said.

Shinkre said that, in certain cases, a seemingly optimal solution may not be ideal, after all. "We're in Mumbai, not Europe. With limited space, we have to regulate so many hawkers," said Shinkre, explaining the mandate given to the committee by the civic body.