

ENVIRONMENT

Littering, defacement to be made an offence with on-the-spot fines

Bill to be introduced in monsoon session of Parliament, give legal teeth to Swachh Bharat drive

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MOVING TO give legal teeth to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the Ministry of Environment and Forests will make littering, throwing waste in the open, dumping electronic waste, defacement of public places and use of banned plastic bags a "minor offence" with fines on the spot.

Sources said an Environmental Laws (Amendment) Bill will be introduced in the monsoon session of Parliament to club these violations as non-cognisable crime to promote public awareness

and educate the masses on cleanliness.

"The Environment (Protection) Act (EPA) does not allow civil financial penalties to usher an active enforcement of environmental laws. And the existing criminal settlement alone is not proving effective. Penalty checks and public participation will lead to in-built social checks," sources said.

The amendment will define minor offence in the EPA that will not call for filing an FIR or arrest but will attract a monetary penalty as in the case of "making atmosphere noxious to health" which attracts a fine of Rs 500. However, the quantum of fine, sources said, will be governed under local municipal laws,



within rules prescribed by the central law.

Minor offence will also include manufacturing, possession and use of restricted or prohibited substance such as plastic bags below the prescribed thickness and violation of their disposal, including electronic waste.

"India's growing prosperity requires alignment with environmental quality, and where both people and the industries will have to be accountable," sources said.

Environment and Forests Minister Prakash Javadekar has been talking of changes in the

EPA to strengthen the compliance mechanism to discourage pollution. His view is that compliance is crucial to changing public attitude, ensuring their participation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship mission, launched last October, is similar to the tidiness project of Singapore's first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew who launched a modernisation drive based on an ethos of cleanliness and introduced fines and penalties for litterbugs.

In the last budget, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley levied a 2 per cent Swachh Bharat Cess on all or any service in addition to 14 per cent service tax to fund the cleanliness campaign.