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VIPs cannot sit on prime realty

The new law will see people vacate official premises on time

No State approves of squatters or encroachers. The Indian State is no different, but often finds its hands tied when it comes to pushing out the legion of VIP squatters. In other words, it finds it difficult to move VIPs out of official accommodation, usually located in the tony areas of a city. But now the government is a step away from arming itself with an amended law — the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Amendment Bill, 2017 — which will ensure ministers, members of Parliament and bureaucrats don't overstay in government bungalows once their term is over.

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Under the rules, a former minister can hold on to his or her official accommodation for a month after demitting office. Once the stipulated time to vacate the house is over, the Union Housing and Urban Affairs ministry takes about two months to initiate eviction proceedings. The amendments will ensure that the ministry starts summary eviction proceedings within three days after the stipulated time given to a former MP or a retired official is over. This will ensure speedy eviction of unauthorised occupants. Also, the clause to approach district court has been removed.

Since it assumed power in May 2014, the NDA has evicted about 1,500 officials and MPs. It is a departure from earlier governments that chose to ignore the transgressions of VIPs holding on to prime real estate in Lutyens' Delhi. The amended eviction law will hopefully end the problem once and for all. These VIPs occupy valuable real estate for years on end, many of them trying to convert the premises into memorials and using every trick in the book to hang on. Around the world, in most democracies, the concept of official accommodation, except for the president or prime minister, is unheard of. In India, on the other hand, not only do politicians and bureaucrats take this perk for granted, they also shamelessly squat on official accommodation long after eviction notices are served.

