

Arms Amendment Bill - Govt to introduce bullets with serial numbers soon: MoS

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By TIOL News Service

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Yesterday passed the Arms (Amendment) Bill, 2019. Speaking on the Bill in Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Home Affairs, Mr G. Kishan Reddy explained in detail the provisions of the amendment and responded to the apprehensions of the Members. He stated that this amendment is not being brought with any political consideration, but to check acts of terrorism and insurgency and use of illegal arms, which is in favour of the common people. The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha yesterday.

Mr Reddy informed that India stands at third position in number of suicides committed with guns and even licensed arms are being put to wrong use, which needs to be prevented, and thus, the proposed amendments are being brought in the Arms Act. Accepting suggestions from the Members, the Minister said that in addition to the limit of two guns being allowed under the latest amendments, individuals would be allowed to retain ancestral guns in a deactivated state. This means that such guns may be kept as demo guns, which must not be in a condition to fire, he added.

In addition to this, Mr Reddy informed that in near future, Government plans to introduce bullets with serial numbers, so as to keep them accounted and traceable. Further, a portal is being developed that would house the National Database on Arms License (NDAL) and Arms License Issuance System (ALIS). This portal would be a one stop platform to access information on arms licenses issued, license holders and the ammunition used.

The Bill seeks to enhance the punishment for existing offences like illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, etc.; illegal acquiring, possessing or carrying prohibited arms or prohibited ammunition; and illegal manufacture, sale, transfer, conversion, import, export, etc., of firearms. It also proposes to define new offences and prescribing punishment for them, such as for taking away firearms from police or armed forces, involvement in organized crime syndicate, illicit trafficking including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited arms and prohibited ammunition, use of firearms in rash and negligent manner in celebratory gunfire endangering human life, etc. Further, the Bill seeks to enhance the period of arms license from three years to five years and also to issue arms license in its electronic form to prevent forgery.

The Amendment assumes significance in recent times as Law enforcement agencies have indicated growing nexus between possession of illegal firearms and commission of criminal offences. With the advancement in technology, the fire power and sophistication of illegal firearms have increased significance over the years. The trans-border dimensions of illegal arms trafficking are causing threat to internal security and to prevent the usage of illicit firearms so trafficked has also become a prime concern. To effectively curb crimes related to or committed by using illegal firearms and to provide effective deterrence against violation of law, there is an urgent need to strengthen the existing legislative framework by making appropriate amendments in the Arms Act, 1959. Simultaneously, there is also a requirement for rationalizing and facilitating the licensing procedures for use of firearms by individuals and sports persons.

Mr Reddy assured the House that the licenses and arms ownership of sportspersons would not be adversely affected because of the Bill and added that in fact the number and types of weapons allowed for sportspersons has been increased. He also remarked that provisions related to ownership of arms by retired and serving personnel of armed forces remains unaffected by the Amendment.

Speaking on the enhanced punishment under the Amendment, the Minister said that prison sentence for illicit trafficking of firearms and ammunition including smuggled firearms of foreign make or prohibited bore had been increased to prison time between 10 years to life imprisonment. Mr Reddy said that the theft of weapons from police or armed forces would carry a punishment of 10 years to life imprisonment; illegal manufacturing, sale, conversion, repair, import/export would attract 7 years to life imprisonment; acquiring, possessing, carrying prohibited arms and ammunition to get 7 to 14 years imprisonment; involvement in organized crime syndicate would all henceforth carry the punishment of 10 years to life imprisonment. He also said that involvement in negligent and rash use of firearms or in celebratory firing endangering human life, would attract a fine of Rs. 1,00,000 or imprisonment for 2 years or both.