

Goyal seeks states' consensus for decriminalising offences under metrology law

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Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal (Photo | PTI)

By PTI

NEW DELHI: Food and consumer affairs minister Piyush Goyal on Monday stressed on simplification and decriminalisation of offences under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 for ease of doing business and asked states to come to a consensus on this issue so that a draft could be put in public domain for feedbacks from all stakeholders. He mentioned that some states are objecting to the proposal of decriminalisation.

Goyal was addressing a 'National Workshop on Legal Metrology Act 2009', which was held with the purpose to take deliberations from stakeholders on decriminalisation of offences under the Legal Metrology Act, keeping a balance between consumers and industries.

The minister also regretted that several states' ministers did not come for the meeting and said that states were not taking this subject seriously.

The workshop is being attended by representatives of more than 30 states and Union Territories. Only 7-8 states were represented by their ministers.

"Please convey to your ministers that we missed them and we would have been very happy if they would have joined us and participated in this very important discussion," he told officials of those states whose ministers did not come for the meeting.

Goyal asked them to convey his displeasure. Stating that the workshop was well-represented, the minister urged to take a final decision on this issue.

He said wide consultations have been held on this proposal in the last few years.

Goyal said it is "our responsibility to protect consumers' interest but the laws should not be misused to harass businessmen".

The Legal Metrology Act 2009 enforces standards related to weights and measures. In its present form, the law prescribes imprisonment, in addition to fine, for second or subsequent offences.

In 2020, the department floated a draft document for public consultations, proposing decriminalisation of offences under the Legal Metrology Act. "My suggestion is to simplify this law and rules as well as decriminalise. There is a need to create an honest system. There should be strict action against habitual offenders," Goyal said.

The minister said there is a need to differentiate between bonafide and malafide intentions for striking a balance between the letter of the law and spirit of the law.

The Union minister said there is a need to discuss whether the parameters for small street vendors and retailers be same as big businessmen.

The system should be simple and wrong practices should end, he said.

Citing data of first and second offences in the last four years, Goyal said: "I fail to understand after the first offence is filed how the number of second offence falls drastically."

He asked the officials of those states which are objecting to the proposal of decriminalisation to explain how it can be possible.

In 2021-22, the total number of cases booked for first offence stood at 74,721, of which 55,779 cases were compounded.

The number of cases booked for second offence fell to 11 and number of cases filed in court of law for second offence stood at only 7.

The minister noted that the data for the last four years was enough to expose states that are objecting to the proposal of decriminalisation.

He wondered how powerful is the penalty imposed by states for first offence that the number of second cases falls significantly.

The minister said those who calibrate weights or certifies weights should not be spared if they are found guilty.

He urged states to consider this proposal seriously to make a honest system and bring an end to bad practices and corruption.