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Clean-Up Drive: Spit In Mamata's City, Cough Up A Hefty Fine

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Clean-up drive: Spit in Mamata's city, cough up a hefty fine

Krishnendu Bandyopadhyay / TNN / Updated: Jun 15, 2012, 03:03 IST

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KOLKATA: The chief minister's favourite blue-white colour combo is getting stained red - with [paan and gutka spit](#) - all across the city. And [Mamata Banerjee](#) is not willing to chew on this and let her dream city turn into a spittoon. Spurred by the CM's fury, her officials are resurrecting an eight-year-old law that imposes a fine of Rs 200 on spitters. But considering how upset the CM is, the penalty may be even steeper, say sources. The mayor and commissioner of police have already met to decide the quantum of fine that would act as a deterrent. Lakhs of people in Kolkata are hooked on chewing-tobacco products and the poribartan government is finding it too hard to change old habits. What was ignored for years as a nuisance gave the city a scare a couple of years ago when it was revealed that betel juice and gutka spit was corroding Howrah bridge. Now, the spit-brigade is spoiling Mamata's multi-crore move to turn Kolkata into a 'blue city'.

The West Bengal and Kolkata Police Acts do deal with spitting as a punishable offence, but it has always been difficult to enforce the law, much as the ban on smoking in public places. The government hopes that enforcing the 'West Bengal Prevention of Spitting in Public Place Act' will act as a deterrent. Mamata decided the theme colour of the city as sky blue in tune with state's new punch-line: 'the sky is the limit'. All government buildings, whenever they are re-painted, would be done in the blue-white scheme. Even Shahid Minar, a landmark of the city, is likely to be re-painted blue. Only heritage buildings like

in the blue-white scheme. Even Shaan Imambar, a landmark of the city, is likely to be re-painted blue. Only heritage buildings like Writers' Buildings and the [Kolkata Municipal Corporation](#) (KMC) HQ will be exempted. Owners of private buildings would also be requested to follow the same pattern, said a senior PWD officer. The Mayor's office left no civic property untouched, be it buildings, railings, bridges, flyovers, pars, road dividers or even the facade of some buildings. An over-zealous Trinamool leader even painted a row of trees blue on Red Road. A few heritage buildings, like the house of the doyen of Bengali theatre Girish Chandra Ghosh, were also painted blue. Even the Victorian lamp-posts in BBD Bag could not escape the blue-white stripes. PWD officials said they had already repainted some public buildings and flyovers. "We have a verbal order, so we have started painting roadside railings in blue and white. Whenever there is a public function we are painting the dais and adjacent areas sky blue. The flyovers have been re-done in blue," said a senior PWD official. But the habit of spitting gutka and paan is damning the beautification project. Sources say the chief minister was very upset when she saw red-stains all over the freshly painted flyover walls and road dividers. "We have to stop this nuisance. We are exploring legal options as it is against the decency of the city," said mayor Sovon Chatterjee. So what does the law say? According to legal experts, it has a close resemblance with Penal Code's Section 268 - 'public nuisance'. However, the ban was largely ineffectual. Police officers admit that barring "a few stray incidents" not too many people have been charged for spitting. "In India, it was impractical to think of enforcing a law that punishes such offences as spitting in public places, given the low levels of consciousness," said an officer. "But we have to start at some point, even if we end up having to arrest every second person on the streets." Enthusiasm continued unabated. Even Dalhousie Square - which still breathes colonial air - was also painted blue in bits and pieces. Though buildings retained the colonial flavour for almost two centuries now, railings have been painted blue and even the age-old Victorian lampposts have been given a blue and white colouring, with the cast iron look disappearing overnight. In fact, the [Trinamool Congress](#) had painted the interiors of the KMC building green after it trounced the CPI(M) in the local elections in 2010. Some railway buildings were also painted green.

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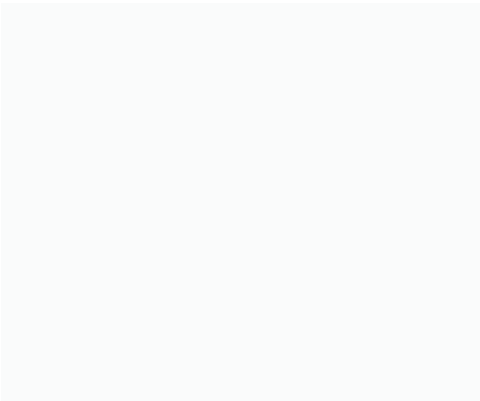
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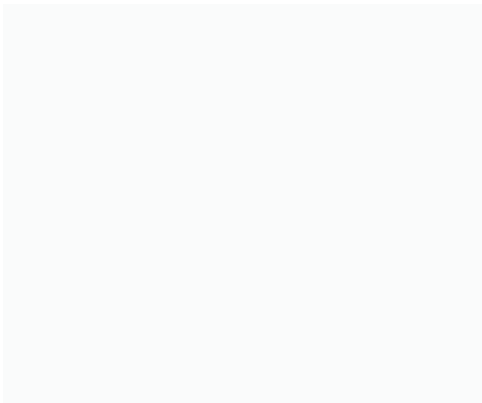
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