

Action on those vice signboards

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New law can halt nuisance

RESIDENTS who find vice parlour signboards a nuisance but are afraid of publicly taking action for fear of revenge may have an alternative choice to get rid of those structures.

They could seek help from a tribunal and yet remain anonymous, if a Bill gazetted today becomes law.

Several government officials and a legal officer who talked to *The Standard* yesterday said they be-

by
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lieved that the term "article" in the Control of Indecent and Obscene Articles Bill 1986 should cover signboards publicising pornographic activities.

The tribunal, comprising a bilingual magistrate and at least two lay adjudicators, will be empowered to classify an article as being indecent, obscene or otherwise.

In the case of pornographic signboards, the tri-

bunal may be able to help the removal of the objectionable structures without having to disclose the identity of the complainant.

However, whether this is, in fact, possible would have to be determined by a test case before the tribunal.

The purpose of the tribunal is primarily aimed at curbing indecent or obscene publications. But since the legal definition of the word "article" is so broad, it can virtually refer to anything, the official said.

Currently, owners' cor-

porations of multi-storey buildings have the right to get rid of any signboards which dangle over the entrance or staircases of their buildings. Many of these signboards are a nuisance to the residents as they advertise vice dens.

However, problems exist, since many multi-storey buildings do not have owners' corporations. And even if an owners' corporation exists, many residents do not dare to take action for fear of reprisals.

Being able to remain anonymous is very important for the clean-up process to be successful.

According to these officials, the Bill might be able to change things.

The legal officer said that under the proposed tribunal scheme, residents who find objectionable signboards hanging near their premises could complain to the police or the relevant authorities.

He said that according to the Bill, if a complaint is accepted, the police or a public officer could apply to the magistracy for an order to remove or obliterate the offending structures.

If the court is satisfied that a complaint has grounds, it will issue an order for the removal of the signboard.

The owner of the building or the structure will be summoned to court to defend himself and if he fails to turn up the Government can execute the order immediately.

Such a system would not require the complainant to be present in court, he said.

However, he pointed out, the tribunal would have to classify the signboard as an "obscene article" before an order for its removal or obliteration could be executed.