CHENNAI: The sands of the Marina are being invaded, with official permission. On paper officials of Greater Chennai Corporation may be busy regulating vendors on the beach for the past two weeks, but in reality they are giving away, maybe unwittingly, the sands by bypassing rules and guidelines.

The corporation is not adhering to the Street Vendors (Protection Of Livelihood and Regulation Of Street Vending) Act, 2014 which states that only shops that have been enumerated in a survey should be provided space in the vending zone.

According to the biometric survey carried out by the corporation in 2017, 1,477 shops were enumerated. But now, there are nearly 2,200 shops and all have been provided space. The corporation has not laid down any conditions or eligibility criteria to give this space. “In a way they are regulating the proxies and unauthorised vendors. This is nothing but a big rip-off of the Marina,” said Shanthi Suresh, a resident.
As per the act, the civic body should survey the vendors and give them certificates for vending that will be renewed every year.

“Conditions for issue of certificate should be created. Every vendor should give an undertaking to the town vending committee before the certificate is issued that he shall carry on the business of street vending himself or through any of his family member and that he has no other means of livelihood,” said Arbind Singh, national co-ordinator of National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI). “He should also not transfer in any manner, including rent, the certificate or the place to any other person.”

But not far from the Labour Statue vendor R Radha* said she paid Rs 300 as rent every day to a man for allowing her to set up a shop. She was neither part of the biometric survey nor has an ID card. “There are many such people who demand ‘50,000 to `1 lakh for shops on the Marina,” said V Maheshwaran, all-India secretary, south zone, of NASVI.
P Muthu of Tamil Nadu Netaji Subash Chandra Bose (Unorganised Workers) Association questioned the rationale behind the relocation even before the street vending committee was formed. “Many of us do not have ID cards. They told us each shop will be numbered and we will be given ID cards,” he said.

Hygiene is another aspect that has to be addressed before shops are allotted. The shops should have Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) certificates. The corporation has announced that it would collect Rs 100 from each shop per month as a ‘cleaning fee’ but receipts for the same are not ready yet.

Rajesh M, a vendor, said the corporation had not even verified who ran the shops. “They have given ID cards to those who do not even have shops here,” he said.

In New Delhi where vendors are regulated, enumeration and creation of vending zones was a tedious process. “The rule is clear. Only one shop will be allowed per family. Even if they are brothers living in the same family, they cannot get a separate space,” said Arbind Singh.

Civic authorities said they were aware that some vendors owned multiple shops and some collected rent. “We will weed them out by clicking photographs of each shop and by providing a unique number to each shop. Currently, whoever is running a shop will get a certificate and a space,” said an official.