



Research Unit
Press Information Bureau
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Government of India



Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

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Introduction

The Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023 was passed by the Parliament today. It replaces the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, which governed the registration of **print and publishing industry** in the country since 1867.

What is the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867?

During the British rule in India, writing of books and other informatory material took a concrete shape and with the advent of printing press, various books on almost all the subjects and periodicals touching every aspect of life started appearing. Thrust on education gave an impetus to this with the result that lot of printed material became available. Those in the field of writing, publishing and printing came up with an idea to organise a system for keeping a record of the publications. The then East India Company was urged to keep a record of the publications. An attempt was made by the authorities to make a collection of the books and other publications emanating from the various printing presses throughout India.

The Board of Directors of East India company issued an instruction that copies of all important and interesting work published in India should be dispatched to England to be deposited in the library of India House. Such an instruction had a slow impact. Again, the Royal Asiatic Society in London urged the then Secretary of State for India to repeat the instruction of the late Board of Directors of East India Company and also desired that catalogues of all the works published in India should be sent to England. A system of voluntary registrations of publications was evolved, but it failed. It was found necessary to establish a system of compulsory sale to Government, of three copies of each work in India. To achieve this purpose, a Bill was introduced in the Legislature for the regulation of printing presses and newspaper for the preservation of copies of books and periodicals containing news printed in the whole of India and for the registration of such books and periodicals containing news.

The Bill was passed by the Legislature and it came on the statute book as [**the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867.**](#)

What was the need for a new Law?

- The Press & Registration of Books Act, 1867 is a colonial era Act enacted with an aim to regulate the Printing Presses and newspapers with severe penalties including imprisonment for non-compliances of its provisions. The processes under the Act were **cumbersome and complex** causing unnecessary hardships to publishers for running a newspaper.
- The Act necessitated the involvement of multiple offices in the State and the Central Government resulting in **delays and impediments** at multiple levels. The process of furnishing a Declaration before the specified Authority, as provided in the Act, its authentication by that Authority and subsequent submission of Application to the Press Registrar – first for Title Verification and thereafter for obtaining Certificate of Registration – was **onerous and time-consuming**.
- Owing to the processes explained above, there is **high pendency** of applications for registration from publishers across India. The **manual processing** and verification of multiple **physical documents** at DM Office and at RNI have added to the processing time. At present, the processing of Registration Applications takes around 5 months in RNI and several months in DM office. In certain cases, the processing takes more than a year.
- The penalties which included imprisonment even for minor non-compliances was not matching with the ethos of the independent India and its constitutional values.
- The PRB Act, 1867 was **not in sync with the changing media landscape** and the changing mode of governance with emphasis on faster and efficient service delivery through technology, and ease of access to citizens.

Hence, the new Law is needed.

How does the PRP Bill, 2023 benefit the publishers/citizens?

Ease of access & Ease of doing business: The new Bill removes the procedural obstacles involving multiple approvals at various stages for starting a newspaper/printed publication in India.

- **Simplified Procedures:** The applications for **Title Verification and Registration** have been combined to form a single step. Earlier, it involved multiple applications requiring approvals and verifications from the DM Office and RNI Office multiple times. The new Bill provides for processing the application for title allotment and registration simultaneously.
- As per the new Bill, the publisher and printer need not file separate applications.

- The Keeper of the Printing Press needs to furnish only an online intimation to the Press Registrar and the District Magistrate (DM). Earlier, the Keeper's Declaration was required to be authenticated by DM Office.

Use of technology: The use of technology along with provisions for online applications and automated processing shall enhance the speed of registration process significantly. Further, coordinating with 700 plus districts (DMs) in India has become easier with the provision for online applications and processing.

- **Transparency and time-bound processing:** The publisher shall be able to stay updated on the status of the applications.

Decriminalization: The new Bill substantially decriminalizes all violations under the old one. Earlier, minor violations of the Act were penalized with imprisonment up to **six months**.

The new Bill provides the much-needed clarity: The new Bill adds clarity on various procedures/cases such as facsimile editions of a foreign publication, Circulation Verification of newspapers, Ownership Transfer, and others. The new Bill has taken away the provisions of registration of books and related clauses from the purview of the PRB Act, 1867.

Further, the new **Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill** testifies the Government's efforts to remove obsolete and archaic provisions from the existing statutes and thus enhance ease of access and ease of living for the common man.

Key differences between the PRB Act, 1867 and the PRP Bill, 2023:

- **Registration of periodicals:** The 1867 Act provides for the registration of newspapers, periodicals, and books. It also provides for the cataloguing of books. The 2023 Bill provides for the registration of periodicals, which include any publication containing public news or comments on public news. Periodicals do not include books or scientific and academic journals.
- **Foreign periodicals:** An exact reproduction of a foreign periodical may be printed in India only with the prior approval of the central government. The manner of registration of such periodicals will be prescribed.
- **No declaration for printing presses:** The 1867 Act provides that a declaration specifying the printer/publisher be made to the DM. The DM sends the declaration to the Press Registrar, who then issues a certificate of registration. Making such declaration and authentication by the DM is necessary for the publication of the newspaper. The 2023 Bill allows the publisher of a periodical to obtain a registration certificate by filing an online application with the Press Registrar General (PRG) and specified local authority. A person who has been convicted of a terrorist act or unlawful

activity, or has acted against the security of the State will not be allowed to publish a periodical.

- **Registration of a printing press:** The 1867 Act requires a printing press to be declared before the DM. The PRP Bill, 2023 allows for information regarding printing presses to be submitted through an online portal.
- **Appellate authority:** The new Bill also provides for an appellate authority. The Appellate Board (Press and Registration Appellate Board) will comprise the Chairperson, Press Council of India (PCI), and two members of PCI to hear an appeal against refusal of grant of registration, imposition of any penalty or suspension/cancellation of registration by PRG. Such appeals may be filed before the Press and Registration Appellate Board within 60 days.

NR/HP/RK/PK