

Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

Why in News?

Recently, the Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023, was passed in the Lok Sabha that seeks to repeal the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867.

Why was this Bill brought in?

- **Objective** - To remove the legacy of the British Raj.
- The 1867 Act *exercise complete control* over the press and the printers and publishers of newspapers and books along with heavy fines and penalties including imprisonment for various violations.
- In today's age of free press and the Government's commitment *to uphold media freedom*, the 1867 law was archaic and outdated.

A periodical means any publication, barring books or journals that is printed at regular intervals and contains public news or comments on public news.

What are key features of the bill?

- **Press Registrar General (PRG)** - It creates a ***new position*** who is entrusted with tasks like
 - Issuing certificates of registration to periodicals
 - Maintaining records of registered periodicals
 - Collecting application fees
 - Disbursing the Centre's funds for the Act's implementation
- **Registration** - A simple online mechanism has been put in place to apply for title verification and grant of certificate of registration.
- **Facsimile edition of a foreign periodical** - Foreign periodicals can be printed in India with prior *approval of the Central Government* and its registration with the Press Registrar General (PRG).
- **Role of District magistrate/local authority** - It reduced their role with regard to grant of Certificate of Registration and title allotment.
- **Suspension** - It allows the PRG to suspend a periodical's registration for a ***minimum period of 30 days which can extend to 180 days*** for
 - Registration obtained by furnishing false information
 - Failure to publish periodicals continuously
 - Giving false particulars in annual statements
- **Cancellation** - The PRG may cancel the registration if
 - The publisher does not correct defects that lead to suspension
 - A periodical has the same title as any other periodical

- The owner/ publisher has been convicted of a terrorist act or unlawful activity, or for acting against the security of the State
- **Penalties** - If a periodical is published without registration, the PRG may direct its publication to be stopped and non-compliance with such direction within 6 months will be punishable with imprisonment of up to 6 months.
- **Press and Registration Appellate Board** - It will be *headed by the Chairman of the Press Council of India* (PCI) and comprise *2 PCI members*.
- It will hear appeals against refusal of registration, imposition of penalties, suspension, or cancellation of registration.

PCI is an autonomous, statutory, quasi-judicial body which governs the conduct of the print media and is also empowered to hold hearings on receipt of complaints and take suitable action where appropriate.

| | Press and Registration of Books Act 1867 | Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill 2023 |
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| Books | They were part of it. | They are not a part as they are administered by Ministry of Education. |
| Printing presses | Need to file declaration before the DM. | Only an online intimation has to be filed before the PRG and the DM. |
| Publisher of the periodical | Need to file declaration before the District authority | No need of filing such declaration. |
| Title allotment and grant of Certificate | Sequential application to be sent to PRG and the district authority. | Simultaneous application can be sent. |
| Decision of approval | By both PRG and the District authority. | Only by the PRG. |
| Title allotment process | At times it took 2-3 years. | 60 days. |
| Penalties for violation | Conviction and imprisonment up to 6 months. | Decriminalized but it can be given in extreme cases. |
| Power to cancel the declaration of a periodical | Only by the DM. | Empowers the PRG to suspend/cancel the certificate of registration. |

What are the advantages of the bill?

- **Improves ease of doing business** - The process of allotment of title and certificate is by a simple and simultaneous application process through an online system without the requirement of any physical interface.
- **Unburdens publishers** - No need of publishers to file a declaration with the DM or the local authorities for authentication.
- **Quick process** - The entire process involves 8 steps and consume less time (60 days).
- **Removes procedural obstacles** - PRG can fast track the process, thereby reducing the difficulty in starting a publication by small and medium publishers.

- **Decriminalizes the colonial era statute** - End criminality, while imprisonment is provided only in extreme cases.
- For certain violations, only financial penalties have been proposed.
- **Good governance** - It ensures good governance through a credible appellate mechanism.

References

1. [The Indian Express| Key features of Press and Periodicals Bill, 2023](#)
2. [PIB| Advantages of the Press and Periodicals Bill, 2023](#)
3. [PRS| Comparison between 1867 Act and 2023 Bill](#)

