

## 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- In today's age of free press and the Government's commitment *to uphold media freedom*, the 1867 law was archaic and outdated.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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| <b>Books</b>   | They were part of it.  | They are not a part as they are administered by Ministry of Education. |
| <b>Printing presses</b>                                | Need to file declaration before the DM.                              | Only an online intimation has to be filed before the PRG and the DM.   |
| <b>Publisher of the periodical</b>                     | Need to file declaration before the District authority               | No need of filing such declaration.                                    |
| <b>Title allotment and grant of Certificate</b>        | Sequential application to be sent to PRG and the district authority. | Simultaneous application can be sent.                                  |
| <b>Decision of approval</b>                            | By both PRG and the District authority.                              | Only by the PRG.   |
| <b>Title allotment process</b>                         | At times it took 2-3 years.  | 60 days.   |
| <b>Penalties for violation</b>                         | Conviction and imprisonment up to 6 months.                          | Decriminalized but it can be given in extreme cases.                   |
| <b>Power to cancel the declaration of a periodical</b> | 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](#)

