



# Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

**For Prelims:** Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, Metcalfe Act, Licensing Regulations by John Adams, Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023 .

**For Mains:** Press Regulation in India, Key Features of Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023

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## Why in News?

Recently, the **Lok Sabha** passed the **Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023**, repealing the colonial era law of the [Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867](#).

- The Bill has already been passed by Rajya Sabha in August 2023.

## What are the Key Features of Press and Registration of Periodicals Bill, 2023?

- **Registration of Periodicals:** The **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**.
    - Whereas, the act provides for the registration of newspapers, periodicals, and books. It also provided for the cataloguing of books.
  - Books have been taken away from the purview of the bill, as books as a subject are administered by the [Ministry of Human Resource and Development](#).
- **Registration Protocols for Publications:** The Bill **enables periodical publishers to register online via the Press Registrar General and specified local authority**.
  - Also, Publishing a periodical is prohibited for individuals **convicted of terrorism or actions** against state security.
  - Whereas, the **act mandated a declaration to the [District Magistrate](#)**, who sent it to the Press Registrar for newspaper publication.
- **Foreign Periodicals:** Reproduction of foreign periodicals within India necessitates prior **approval from the central government**. Specific protocols for registering such periodicals will be outlined.
- **Press Registrar General:** This Bill introduces the role of the **Press Registrar General of India**, responsible for issuing registration certificates for all periodicals.
  - Additionally, their duties encompass maintaining a **periodical register, establishing guidelines for periodical titles, verifying circulation figures, and managing registration revisions**, suspensions, or cancellations.
- **Printing Press Registration:** Declarations regarding printing presses can now be submitted online to the **Press Registrar General**, deviating from the previous requirement of declarations made before the **District Magistrate**.
- **Suspension and Cancellation of Registration:** The Press Registrar General holds authority to **suspend a periodical's registration for a minimum of 30 days (extensible up to 180 days)** due to various reasons including furnishing false information, discontinuity in publication, or providing inaccurate annual statements.

- Failure to rectify these issues could result in registration cancellation.
- Further grounds for cancellation include **similarity in titles with other periodicals or convictions related to terrorism or acts against national security** by the owner/publisher.
- **Penalties and Appeals:** The Bill empowers the Press Registrar General to **levy penalties for unregistered periodical publication** or failure to furnish annual statements within specified timelines.
  - Non-compliance with these directives may lead to imprisonment for up to **six months**.
  - Additionally, provisions for appeals against refusal of registration certificates, suspension/cancellation of registration, or imposed penalties are available, with a **60-day window to file appeals before the Press and Registration Appellate Board**.

## What are the other Pre-Independence Legislations Related to Press Regulation?

- **Censorship under Lord Wellesley (1799):** Enacted due to French invasion fears, imposing strict wartime press controls, including pre-censorship.
  - Relaxed later by **Lord Hastings** in 1818, removing pre-censorship.
- **Licensing Regulations by John Adams (1823):** Instituted penalties for starting or operating a press without a license, later extended to cover various publications.
  - Primarily targeted Indian language newspapers or those led by Indians, leading to the cessation of **Rammohan Roy's Mirat-ul-Akbar**.
- **Press Act of 1835 (Metcalf Act):** Repealed the restrictive 1823 ordinance, earning Metcalfe the title "Liberator of the Indian press."
  - Mandated precise declarations by printers/publishers about their premises and allowed cessation as required.
- **Licensing Act during the 1857 Revolt:** Imposed further licensing restrictions due to the 1857 emergency.
  - Augmented existing registration procedures, granting the government power to halt the circulation of any printed material.
- **Vernacular Press Act, 1878:** Designed to regulate the vernacular press, suppress seditious writing, and prevent discord among different communities.
  - Required printers and publishers of vernacular newspapers to sign a bond refraining from disseminating **anti-government or divisive content**.
  - Decisions made by the magistrate were final without any avenue for appeal in court.
- **Newspaper (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908:** Empowered magistrates to seize press properties publishing objectionable content inciting violence or murder.
  - [Bal Gangadhar Tilak](#), a militant nationalist leader, faced sedition charges and was transported to Mandalay, sparking widespread protests and strikes.
- **Indian Press Act, 1910:** Local governments could demand security at registration, penalize offending newspapers, and require free copies for scrutiny.
  - Impeded press freedom by imposing stringent regulations similar to those in the Vernacular Press Act.