

INTRODUCTION

The press in India has played an unprecedented role in shaping public opinion and channelising the energy of people in India's bid to freedom. Therefore, soon after independence, the Government of free India set up the First Press Commission under Justice G. S. Rajadhyaksha for the development and growth of press in the country, which has grown in all dimensions since then. Today, the press continues to support the Indian democracy by being a conscience keeper ensuring transparency in the governance of the nation.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF RNI

The office of the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) is an attached office of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and a statutory office under Section 19(A) of the **Press & Registration of Books Act, 1867**.

The main objective of this Act during the British period was to keep a record of Books and Publications published in the country. The Act has been amended 22 times since then (equal number of times before and after independence).

Until 1956, there was no central authority for registration of publications in India. The Registration record was maintained by the respective District Magistrates at their offices. The RNI office was established as a result of the recommendations of the First Press Commission, which, in its report submitted to the Government of India in 1954, suggested the constitution of a statutory authority responsible for the collection of reliable statistics regarding the press in India. As a result, the office of the Registrar for Newspapers of India came into existence in 1956 with headquarters at New Delhi. The office functioned at various places in Delhi before moving to its current location at Soohna Bhawan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road in 2018. Till 1977, there was also a Regional Office at Shimla, looking after certain functions related to registration, before it was closed down. In the 1990s, RNI established regional offices in Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai under the VIIIth Plan. Two more offices were established in Bhopal and Guwahati under the IXth Plan. However, in 2016, as part of a consolidation exercise, all five regional offices of RNI were closed down and some of their functions were transferred to Press Information Bureau offices in respective stations.

FUNCTIONS OF RNI

The duties and functions of the RNI can be classified into two broad categories:

(i) Statutory, and (ii) Non- statutory. However, with the passage of time, RNI has assumed various other duties and responsibilities too.

(i). Statutory Functions:

- Compilation and maintenance of a register of newspapers published and registered with RNI;
- Issuance of Certificate of Registration to the newspapers under Section 19(C) of the PRB Act, published under valid declaration;
- Ensure submission of annual statements sent by the publishers of newspapers every year under Section 19(D) of the Act, containing information on circulation, ownership, etc;
- Informing the District Magistrates about the availability of proposed titles for intending publishers for filing declaration under proviso to Section 6 of the Act;
- Preparation and submission to the Government, on or before 31st December each year, a report containing all available information and statistics about the Press in India, with particular reference to the emerging trends in circulation;

(ii). Non-statutory Functions:

- **Authentication of Self-Declaration** of the registered newspapers to enable them to import newsprint as actual users.
- Verification of Circulation claims of newspapers, as authorised under Section 19(F) of the Act.
- Issuance of **No Newspaper Certificates** under Foreign Contributions [Regulation] Act, 1976.

(iii). Present Status of Non-statutory Functions:

- In place of **Eligibility Certificates**, **Authentication of Self-Declaration Certificate** is being done by this office for import of newsprint w.e.f. 16-07-2017 via Order No. 09/2015-2020 dated 3.6.2016 issued by DGFT.
- During the period 01-April-2020 to 31-March-2021, No **Essentiality Certificate** and No **Newspaper Certificates** had been issued by this office.

Title Verification

The Registration of newspapers and other periodicals is done in two steps. In the first step, the intending publisher has to apply in the office of District Magistrate (DM) concerned for title verification in the prescribed format. The application is forwarded by the DM concerned to RNI for title verification. After the title verification, the publisher and/or printer is required to file declaration (Form I) in the office of the DM concerned. After authentication of the declaration, Volume - I, Issue - I of the publication is to be brought out within the stipulated timeframe. Thereafter, the publisher is required to submit the requisite documents to RNI office for issuing Registration Certificate. In case the complete/correct documents for registration are not received within the stipulated period of time from the date of title verification, the title gets automatically de-blocked and becomes available to any intending applicant. The first exercise to de-block unregistered titles was undertaken in 1998 in which about 1.7 lakh titles were de-blocked to prevent squatting. A total of 34 titles were de-blocked during the year 2020-21.

The procedure of title verification is derived from proviso to Section 6 of PRB Act, 1867 which states that the DM concerned shall inquire from Press Registrar that the newspaper proposed to be published should not bear a title which is same as, or similar to, that of any other newspaper published either in the same language or in the same state. The titles are verified within the framework of RNI guidelines for this purpose.

RNI verifies the title forwarded by the DM concerned after checking the data of the titles already verified. Before computerization of the registration data in 1999, a manual card system was maintained. However, computerization has facilitated software - based checking. Now, since the data of titles already verified is available on RNI website, the intending applicants can have an idea of existing titles before applying. The title verification letter addressed to the DM concerned with copy to the applicant has been made available on RNI website for download, since July 2014. A facility has also been created in 2014 for filling title application online on the RNI website. Printout of the same is then to be submitted to the DM concerned, for forwarding to RNI for title verification.

In 2020-21, as many as 10,394 title applications were received and 5,480 titles were verified.

Indian/Facsimile Editions of Foreign Publications

The Print Media Policy of the Government was revised in 2002 and following changes were made in 2002 and subsequently:

- (a) Allowing publication of Indian editions of foreign owned scientific, technical and specialty magazines/periodicals/journal (that is, those not dealing in news and current affairs as generally understood) in India, on a case to case basis, on the specific recommendations of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

- (b) Allowing foreign investment (including FDI) up to 70 percent (enhanced to 100% in 2005) in Indian entities publishing scientific/technical and specialty magazines/periodicals/journals.
- (c) FDI (which includes FDI by NRIs, PIOs) and portfolio investments (in 2005) by recognised FIIs, together up to a ceiling of 26 percent of paid up equity capital, in Indian entities publishing newspapers and periodicals dealing with news and current affairs. Such investment would be permissible by foreign entities having sound credentials and international standing, subject to certain conditions.
- (d) Facsimile editions (in 2005), in whole or in part(s), of foreign newspapers, by Indian entities, with or without foreign investment, and also by foreign companies owning the original newspaper, provided that they get incorporated and registered in Indian under the Companies Act, 1956.

The titles for Indian/Facsimile editions of Foreign Publications are verified by RNI as per instructions issued vide M/o Information & Broadcasting's OM No 10/34/2004-Press dated 16th June, 2004 and No. 10/28/2007-Press dated 13th June, 2011.

Certificate of Registration

The process of registration of a publication starts after the verification of a title. After the title verification, an intending publisher is required to submit a declaration duly authenticated by the concerned DM along with a copy of the first issue published within specified days after authentication of declaration as per the Act. After ascertaining that the publication has been printed and published in conformity with the various provisions of the PRB Act, 1867 and the rules made there under, a registration number is allotted to the newspaper/periodical and entries made in the register of RNI. The Certificate of Registration (CR) is then issued to the publisher by the Press Registrar. A total of 1097 Registration Certificates have been issued by RNI during 2020-21 in fresh cases.

The Registration Numbers were issued as a Serial Number/Year starting from 1/57 issued to "Vishva Jyoti" from Punjab, till the Registration No. 72557/99. After computerization of the data, a system of issuing Registration Number with State & Language code was started. First such number against the serial no. 72558 was issued to "Rashtriya Hindi Mail", New Regd. No. CHHHIN/1998/00001.

Maintenance of Record of Registration

Under Section 19(B) of the PRB Act, 1867 the Press Registrar is required to maintain in the prescribed manner a Register of Newspapers. Such record has been maintained by RNI office in the form of Registers containing two page proforma till Regd. No. 28734 issued in 1976. Later, the record was maintained in the form of a single page only. In 1999, the existing registration data was computerised and the record was maintained in the form of computer generated office copy since April, 2007. The first such record is of "Bankurar Mukh" (Regd. No. WBBEN/2004/19101).

Revised Registration Certificate

Under Sections 5(2D, 2E, 3 &7) of the PRB Act, 1867 existing declaration becomes void and a fresh declaration is required if there is change of owner, publisher, printer, language, periodicity, place of publication, place of printing and re-publication after one year. In all such cases, RNI issues a revised Registration Certificate to the publishers on submission of requisite documents, after the revised declaration is authenticated by the DM concerned.

The title is regarded as 'property' under the ordinary law and can be transferred or inherited, like other property. On the death of the proprietor, it passes to his/her legal representatives or the Official Assignee, in case of bankruptcy. The right of a registered title is also transferable as 'intangible property'. In case of transfer of ownership, a deed authenticated by a Magistrate is required along with the new declaration.

Computerised Process of Title Verification & Registration

The office of RNI has undergone several changes since its inception and the most important of all is the computerisation of its functioning and system. RNI has installed hardware and software to streamline its functions like allotment of titles, registration of newspapers, preparation of the “Press in India” and other activities. Apart from the computer based processing of verification of titles as well as registration, all the verified titles and registration details have been put on the RNI’s website, www.rni.nic.in, which is updated periodically. With the introduction of the latest facilities in public domain, any person/prospective publisher can check the list of existing titles. The data is available State/Language-wise. This has facilitated the end users to know the status of their title application or registration process online. The Title Letter, Discrepancy Letter and copy of the Registration Certificate can also be downloaded from the RNI’s website online. The new user friendly website of RNI, i.e., www.rni.nic.in was launched on June 1, 2018.

Automation

The automation project of RNI started in the year 2020 with an in-house team of programmers led by NIC. The project envisages the automation of Title verification, Registration, Newsprint certificate generation, Regularity updates, Annual statements filing, e-grievances, and other day to day operations of RNI. This will streamline and digitalise the process of Title verification, Registration, Newsprint certificate generation, Regularity submissions and submission of Annual Statements. The project also has a facility to link these modules with the National Single Window System.

Annual Statement

As per Section 19(D) of the PRB Act, 1867, an Annual Statement in Form-II prescribed in the Registration of Newspapers (Central) Rules 1956 is required to be submitted by the publishers of newspapers to the Press Registrar on or before the last day of May each year containing various information as prescribed under the rules. It is also obligatory on the part of every publisher to print in the publication, a statement indicating the ownership and other relevant particulars in Form IV, in the first issue every year after the last day of February.

Annual Statement as submitted by the publisher is the document on the basis of which RNI undertakes compilation and analysis of the status of the press, which is incorporated in its Annual Report, called “Press in India”.

It has been seen that a large number of publishers do not furnish their Annual Statements. RNI is responsible for presenting an analysis of the Print Media in the country to the Union Government; therefore it is imperative for the publishers to send their Annual Statements to the RNI office on or before the due date, i.e., 31st May every year. A credible and holistic documentation and analysis of the print media is possible only with the full cooperation of the publishers. Annual Statements were received 100 percent online for the first time for 2013-14 and the number was 19,660. For the year 2020-21, 32,938 Annual Statements were submitted online including 214 Annual Statements for the Miscellaneous Publications.

Press in India

Under Section 19(G) of the PRB Act, 1867, the Press Registrar shall, in such form and at such time each year as may be prescribed, submit an Annual Report containing summary of the information obtained by him during the previous year in respect of the newspapers in India and giving an account of the working of such newspapers and copies thereof shall be forwarded to the government. The first such Report ‘PRESS IN INDIA 1956’ was submitted to the Central Government on April 30, 1957, by the first Press Registrar, Shri M. L. Bhardwaj. It covered a period of six months, i.e. July to December 1956. It contained information collected from the newspapers supposed to be in existence on July 1, 1956, from across the country obtained after correspondence with as many as 6,000 publishers. A proforma ‘Statement of Facts’ was sent to the publishers and they were asked to return it back after filling the details. Information regarding existing newspapers was also collected from the State Governments. The

first Chapter 'Introduction' of the Report rightly ends with the words that it was more exploratory than expository in character. As per the report, there were 6,407 newspapers in the country as on July 1, 1956 and their number went up to 6,570 newspapers on December 31, 1956.

Since then, "**Press in India**" is brought out every year on the basis of the information provided by the publishers in the Annual Statements filed under Rule 6(1) of 'The Registration of Newspapers (Central) Rules, 1956'. The first Press in India was published in single volume, but thereafter it has been published in two volumes (parts) each year. The first part was devoted to the study and analysis of Indian Press on the basis of Annual Statements submitted by publishers and the second part was devoted to the information containing a catalogue of newspapers published in the country. The practice of publishing in two parts was discontinued in between and at present it is again being brought out in two volumes. Since 2013-14, the "**Press in India**" is also being brought out in digital format as Pen drives and is also available on the website of RNI (www.rni.nic.in).

Checking and Verification of Circulation Claims

The Annual Statements submitted by the publishers under Section 19(D) of the PRB Act, 1867 contain details of the circulation of newspapers indicating:

- (a) The average number of copies printed per publishing day; and
- (b) The average number of copies sold and the average number of copies distributed free of cost, which includes complimentary copies, vouchers, exchange, bonus, samples and office copies.

A Chartered Accountant or a qualified Auditor is required to authenticate/certify the Publisher's statement in cases where the number of circulated copies exceeds 2,000. Such certificate is not necessary in the case of educational institutions, charitable societies or associations which publish newspapers generally for the use of their members and not for sale

Section 19(F) of the PRB Act, 1867 provides that the Press Registrar or any gazetted officer authorised by him in writing in this behalf shall, for the purpose of the collection of any information relating to a newspaper under this act, have access to any relevant record or document relating to the newspaper in the possession of the publisher thereof and may enter at any reasonable time any premises where he believes such record or documents to be and may inspect or take copies of the relevant records or documents or ask any question necessary for obtaining any information required to be furnished under this Act.

RNI is now verifying the circulation of newspapers as per the Print Media Policy of 2020, i.e., having a circulation above 25,000 copies per publishing day on request basis or cases referred to it by BOC (erstwhile DAVP) or on the request of the publishers or complaints.

Circulation check being a specialised job, the services of CA/Auditors empanelled with CAG/ABC/RBI are being utilised for assistance in checking financial records and are being paid an honorarium by RNI. This is as per the proposal approved by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in consultation with Ministry of Law. As per Ministry's Order dated 14.7.2016 and Order dated 01.09.2017, the officers of PIB/ROB (erstwhile DFP) have been designated as Additional Press Registrar, Deputy Press Registrar, Assistant Press Registrar and Registration Supervisor. This has facilitated the publishers in a big way as they can now approach the local/regional PIB offices to verify their circulation claims.

The RNI's officers also conduct spot checks at the premises of newspapers and periodicals to verify relevant records and infrastructure, so as to arrive at a correct circulation figure and reject exaggerated claims.

The authenticated circulation data enables publishers to avail various concessions and facilities provided by the Central and the State Governments. The verified circulation figure serves as a basis for the Central and State Governments to determine advertisement rates and also to consider eligibility for press accreditation.

Newsprint (Policy and Guidelines)

RNI authenticates the Self-declaration Certificate instead of issuing Eligibility Certificate w.e.f. 16-07-2017 to the registered publications for the import of newsprint on Actual User Condition basis as per EXIM Policy of the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

The policy condition is as follows:-

“Item cover under EXIM Code heading 4801 shall however be permitted without an import license subject to Actual User condition to those who hold Registrations Certificate issued by the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, on submission of necessary documentary evidence, duly authenticated by the RNI, to the satisfaction of the Customs authorities at the time of clearance of goods. In addition, importer shall also be required to submit an annual audited statement reflecting the total quantity and value of the newsprint consumed and quantity imported by them in the preceding (Licensing) year to the Registrar of Newspapers for India, by 30 April of each year. The format of the declaration and the annual statement and other guidelines in this regard shall be as announced by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from time to time”.

The Newsprint was de-channelised in April 1992 and RNI was asked to continue to issue the Eligibility/Entitlement Certificates as per the Government’s Newsprint Import Policy. Under the liberalisation policy of the Government, newsprint was put under Open General License (OGL) vide M/o Commerce Notification No. 3(RE-95) 92-97 dated 30.04.1995. This made Standard and Glazed newsprint freely importable to the registered newspapers. The order remained in force during 1995 and 1996. Thereafter, in the changing scenario of liberalised economy, a new policy was introduced by M/o Commerce vide public Notification No. 22(RE-96)/92-97 dated 29th January, 1997 followed by amendments dated 5th March, 1997 which states that import shall be permitted without an import license subject to Actual User Condition to those who hold ‘**Registration Certificate**’ issued by RNI. On that basis, RNI started **Authentication of the Certificate of Registration** for the import of newsprint.

Further in the year 1999, a slight modification was made in the newsprint policy and guidelines vide M/o I&B’s Public Notification No. 601/1/99-Policy, dated 26th February, 1999 and the words, “**Guidelines for issue of Authentication of the Certificate of Registration**” had been substituted by the words, “**Guidelines for issue of Eligibility Certificate**”. The present import policy was based on the Government’s Newsprint Import Policy enunciated in 1997 which imposes no restriction on the quantity to be imported by the Actual users. During the year 2006-07, Ministry of I&B revised the form of Annual Return showing the import and consumption details of newsprint. As per directions of the Ministry, an affidavit showing the details of imported newsprint for the previous two years and the proposed quantity of newsprint to be imported during the current financial year was introduced. The format of **Eligibility Certificate** was also changed. The quantity of import was based on the figures mentioned in the affidavit in which the publishers had to state the consumption of newsprint for the two previous years and the proposed quantity of consumption for the current year.

The Ministry of Commerce & Industry had further made amendments in the policies/guidelines (Notification No. 29 dated 28.1.2004) under which instead of furnishing half-yearly statement, an annual statement is required to be submitted to RNI. Copy of the guidelines and the current newsprint import policy along with the latest amendments, application form etc. are available at RNI website (www.rni.nic.in).

The Ministry of Commerce & Industry had further made amendments in the policies/guidelines (Notification No. 09/2015-2020 dated 3.6.2016 issued by DGFT).

Existing Policy Condition No.-2 of Chapter 48 of ITC (HS), 2012, Schedule – I (Import Policy) is as follows:

“Item cover under Exim Code heading 4801 shall however be permitted without an import licence subject to Actual User condition to those who hold ‘Registrations Certificate’ issued by the RNI, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, on submission of necessary documentary evidence, duly authenticated by the RNI, to the satisfaction of the Customs authorities at the time of

import of goods. In addition, importer shall also be required to submit an annual audited statement reflecting the total quantity and value of the newsprint consumed and quantity of newsprint imported by them in the preceding (Licensing) year to the Registrar of Newspapers for India, by 30th April of each year. The format of the declaration and the annual statement and other guidelines in this regard shall be as announced by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from time to time.”

Effect of this Notification: Actual users holding Registration Certificate from RNI can import item covered under EXIM Code heading 4801 by filing bill of entry for home consumption or warehousing, at the time of import of goods. RNI no longer decides the quantity of newsprint being imported.

No Newspaper Certificate

No newspaper certificate is issued under the Foreign Contributions [Regulation] Act, 1976 to those registered publications, which give affidavits that they do not contain news and views contents in their publications and thus are not a newspaper. These certificates are required by them to be submitted to the Home Ministry for getting permission to accept Foreign Contributions. No such certificates were issued during FY 2020-21.

RNI ACHIEVEMENTS & PUBLISHER FACILITATION

Some of the major achievements of RNI in the last three years are as under:-

- a) Advances in the field of Information Technology have enabled RNI to devise certain applications for facilitation of publishers. One such application is uploading all the details about title verification & registration cases on its website for public view. This has led publishers to know the status of their title applications as well as registration status instantly.
- b) RNI is regularly sending information through SMS and through E-mail to the applicant about the status of title applications as well as registration applications.
- c) The e-filing of Annual Statements is being implemented vigorously.
- d) Title Application has been made online since 01.03.2015.
- e) A central processing unit has been established with the vision of facilitation and comprehensive scrutiny of documents for ease of doing business.
- f) The office of RNI has shifted to Soochna Bhawan to have better synergy with other media units and to modernise and strengthen RNI Headquarters.
- g) Authentication of Self-Declaration for import of newsprint in place of Eligibility Certificates for ease of doing business has been implemented.
- h) Delegations of powers to regional units of PIB for circulation verification and complaint redressal have been executed for further publisher facilitation.
- i) A token system was evolved in RNI for the efficient handling of publishers' grievances.
- j) In January 2020, a special drive was conducted to encourage more publishers to file their annual statements. As a result, approximately three thousand new annual statements were submitted.
- k) The revised bill in lieu of The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 was put up for stakeholders' consultation and is under submission.
- l) Automation project started in the year 2020.