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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
(2005-2006)**

FOURTEENTH LOK SABHA

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING

*[Action taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations of the
Committee contained in their Nineteenth Report (Fourteenth Lok Sabha)
on Functioning of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI)]*

TWENTY-FOURTH REPORT



सत्यमेव जयते

**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

December, 2005/Agrahayana, 1927 (Saka)

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on Functioning of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI)]*

Presented to Lok Sabha on 20.12.2005

Laid in Rajya Sabha on 20.12.2005



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NEW DELHI

December, 2005/Agrahayana, 1927 (Saka)

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COMPOSITION OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2005-2006)

Shri M.M. Pallam Raju — *Chairman*

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3. Shri Raj Shekhar Sharma — *Director*
4. Shri K.L. Arora — *Under Secretary*

*Nominated *w.e.f.* 27.9.2005.

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman Standing Committee on Information Technology (2005-06) having been authorised by the Committee to submit the Report on their behalf, present this Twenty Fourth Report on Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations of the Committee contained in their Nineteenth Report (Fourteenth Lok Sabha) on Functioning of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) relating to the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.

2. The Nineteenth Report was presented to the Lok Sabha and laid in Rajya Sabha on 13 May, 2005. The Ministry furnished Action Taken Notes on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Report on 2 September, 2005.

3. The Report was considered and adopted by the Committee at their sitting held on 15 December, 2005.

4. For facility of reference and convenience, the Recommendations/Observations of the Committee have been printed in bold letters in the body of the Report.

5. An analysis of Action Taken by the Government on the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Nineteenth Report (Fourteenth Lok Sabha) of the Committee is given at Annexure-II.

NEW DELHI;
16 December, 2005
25 Agrahayana, 1927 (Saka)

M.M. PALLAM RAJU,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on
Information Technology.

CHAPTER I

REPORT

This Report of the Standing Committee on Information Technology deals with the action taken by the Government on the recommendations contained in the Nineteenth Report (Fourteenth Lok Sabha) on "Functioning of Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI)" relating to the Ministry of information & Broadcasting.

2. The Nineteenth Report was presented to the Lok Sabha on 13.5.2005 and was laid on the table of Rajya Sabha on 13.5.2005. It contained 14 recommendations.

3. Action Taken Notes in respect of all the Recommendations/Observations contained in the Report have been received and categorised as under:

- (i) Recommendations/Observations which have been accepted by the Government:

Recommendation Nos. 1, 2, 5-11, 13, 14

Total : 11

Chapter-II

- (ii) Recommendations/Observations which the Committee do not desire to pursue in view of the replies of the Government:

Recommendation Nos. Nil

Total : Nil

Chapter-III

- (iii) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which the replies of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee and which require reiteration:

Recommendation Nos. 3, 4, 12

Total : 03

Chapter-IV

- (iv) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which the replies are of interim nature:

Recommendation Nos. Nil

Total : Nil

Chapter-V

4. The Committee trust that utmost importance would be given to the implementation of the recommendations accepted by the Government. In cases, where it is not possible for the Ministry to implement the recommendations in letter and spirit for any reason, the matter should be reported to the Committee with reasons for non-implementation. The Committee further desire that Action taken Notes on the recommendations/observations contained in Chapter-I of this Report be furnished to them urgently and in no case later than six months of the presentation of the Report.

5. The Committee will now deal with Action Taken by the Government on some of their recommendations.

Plan Outlay

Recommendation (No. 3)

6. Emphasising the need for prudence in the budgetary exercise, the Committee in their earlier Report had recommended as follows:

“The Committee observe that there was no Plan budgetary provision for RNI during the 9th Plan. In the 1st year of the 10th Plan (2002-2003), Rs. 60 lakh were allocated under this head. The amount remained unutilised as the Plan scheme was not approved by the competent authority. Further, a proposed allocation of Rs. 132.00 lakh was reduced to Rs. 41.50 lakh due to redefinition of scheme and non-completion of the sanctioned work by CPWD in the year 2003-2004. The actual expenditure was only Rs. 36.73 lakhs. The Committee feel that there is a lot to be desired in RNI in the field of planning, as saving due to non-completion of work and redefinition does not appear to be good planning. It is in these circumstances, for the year 2004-2005 a meagre amount of Rs. 29.5 lakh has been allocated.

The Committee desire that RNI should undertake its budgetary exercise prudently and with due seriousness in a realistic manner. Plan development leads to improved quality and service. The Committee hope that the funds allocated in Tenth Plan for computerisation and renovation of RNI headquarters would be fully utilised as envisaged by the Ministry. They desire that RNI should make every effort to expend the allocated funds of Rs. 29.5 lakh during the year 2004-05 so as to improve quality of services rendered by it”.

7. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the proposals for the financial year 2005-06 of the Plan Scheme 'Modernisation of RNI' has been prepared and is under process for approval.

8. **The Committee regret to observe that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting have not been able to finalise any concrete plan for modernisation of RNI so far. Considering the fact that a period of only about four months are left in the ongoing financial year, the Committee wonder whether the Ministry would be able to utilise the budgetary allocation gainfully. This clearly shows the lack of seriousness on the part of the Ministry in the matter which is a matter of concern to the Committee. They, therefore, reiterate that the proposals for modernisation of RNI should be processed expeditiously and necessary follow-up-action taken promptly with a view not only to utilising the budgetary allocations purposefully but also streamlining functioning of the Organisation.**

Verification of Titles

Recommendation (No. 4)

9. Dealing with the present procedures on verification of titles, the Committee in their earlier Report had recommended as follows:

"The Committee note that as per provision of PRB Act, 1867 applications for title verification are received by RNI through District Magistrates. The DM first verifies the details and sends the application to RNI in Delhi. RNI then verifies the availability of the titles. The Committee note that a lot of time is being consumed in this process causing great inconvenience to the publishers who keep waiting for title clearance to start a publication.

The Committee are aware that DMs have a number of important assignments apart from maintaining law and order in the Districts. Hence, it may not be possible for the DMs to give priority to the work assigned to them by RNI. The Committee, therefore, desired that for expeditious disposal of work, the existing procedure may be modified to the extent under which the publisher applies to the DM with a copy of the same endorsed to RNI so that RNI can at once start the job of title clearance subject to verification of other details from the District Magistrates. The Committee also desire that the Ministry should concentrate on expediting the on-line registration process to simplify the procedure".

10. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 does not permit Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) to accept the application directly from the publisher for verification of titles and these have to be routed through concerned District Magistrates (DM) only. However, RNI has implemented online checking of title status by the publishers. Besides this, as per the Citizen's Charter the following time limits have been set:

- (a) Title Clearance-21 days from the day it is received in the RNI office from the DM's Office.
- (b) Registration-Response must be given in 45 days from the day papers are received in RNI.
- (c) Circulation—Decision in two months from the date all papers are received in RNI.

Also, RNI, in consultation with National Informatics Centre (NIC) is developing a software for updated application status for registration online.

11. The Committee note that in pursuance of their recommendation, RNI have since implemented online checking of status by the publishers. They also note that RNI are also developing a software in consultation with NIC for updated applications status for online registration. The Committee further note that time limits have been set under Citizen's Charter for title clearance. While the Committee appreciate these steps which are in the right direction, they are unable to endorse the Ministry's attitude on the question of initiating action for registration by RNI on the basis of the endorsement made by the applicant. The Ministry, in their action taken reply have merely reproduced the existing provisions of the Law without acknowledging the need for amendment to the relevant provisions of the Act. Since the Ministry are stated to be in the process of amending the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, the Committee desire that their recommendation be examined and necessary action taken in order to make the process more responsive to the changed media environment. The Committee also expect the Ministry to take conclusive action for developing a suitable software in consultation with NIC within a specific period, say one year.

De-Blocking of Titles

Recommendation (No. 6)

12. Stressing the need for making the exercise of de-blocking of titles more frequent, the Committee in their earlier Report had recommended as follows:

“The Committee find that for seeking registration, there is a provision that after the declaration is authenticated by the District Magistrate, the publisher is required to bring out the first issue of the newspaper within 42 days in case of daily or weekly and within 90 days for publications with a periodicity of more than a week, otherwise their titles would be cancelled. However, the procedure of cancellation being mechanical and lengthy was not adhered to and resulted in blocking of titles. The first exercise to de-block unregistered titles was undertaken only in the year 1998, in which about 1.7 lakhs titles were de-blocked. Thereafter titles are being de-blocked after two years. The Committee desire that de-blocking should be carried out more frequently and publishers should not be denied titles on grounds other than genuine.”

13. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the process of de-blocking of titles for the year 2002 was already been started by RNI. Further, RNI is in consultation with NIC for preparing a software for faster de-blocking.

14. The Committee desire to be informed about the progress made in evolving a software for faster de-blocking of titles.

Verification of Circulation Claim

Recommendation (No. 11)

15. Commenting on the issue of verification of circulation claim, the Committee in their earlier Report had recommended as follows:

“The Committee note that one of the important functions of RNI is to verify circulation claims made by the publishers. However, in view of the limited manpower available with RNI, RNI has confined the circulation checks to only cases referred to it by DAVP/PIB/State Govt. and some other undertakings. RNI also undertakes circulation checks on the basis of complaints. The Committee further note that out of the total 2658 cases referred in the year 2000, 2001 and 2002-03, 2628 cases were referred by DAVP,

5 cases were referred by State Governments, one case by PIB and the remaining 24 were miscellaneous complaints.

The Committee also note that the number of circulation checks done by RNI is decreasing year after year. During 2001, 2002-03 and 2003-04, 1679, 1304 and 788 circulation checks could be carried out. Though RNI expects to touch the figure of 700 circulation checks respectively during 2004-05, the Committee find that around 378 circulation checks would still remain pending. The Committee observe that the decline in the number of circulation checks is due to (i) the increased number of requests for spot checks received from DAVP, which has risen from 25 to 150 annually (one spot check takes time equal to six document based checks); (ii) shortage of staff (two posts of Circulation Officers & Accounts Clerks are lying vacant in RNI); and (iii) non-availability of trained technical experts who have to be hired from outside.

Effective circulation check pre-supposes adequate trained manpower to ensure checks to be carried out at least once a year. The Committee desire that for effective verification of circulation claims of newspapers, besides redeployment of staff within RNI wherever and whenever required, services of PIB officers and technical experts from outside should also be availed of. The Committee also desire that RNI should ensure that circulation checks are done within a fixed time-frame to minimize the problems being faced by the publishers."

16. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI) has already written to the press Information Bureau (PIB) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants inviting their suggestions to streamline the process of circulation checks. To ensure that a larger number of spot checks can be completed every year, within a fixed time-frame, the matter has been taken up, for utilizing the additional manpower resources available in PIB and in its regional and branch offices. Further, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has also been approached by RNI for suggestions of suitable changes in the current methodology being adopted by RNI for assessing the circulation of a newspaper, which is presently based on various inputs and scrutiny of documents.

17. The Committee note that in pursuance of their recommendation, RNI have initiated steps to streamline the process of circulation checks in consultation with the Press Information Bureau, the Institute of Chartered Accountants, etc. The Committee

desire that earnest efforts should be made to expeditiously complete the process and take concrete action with a view to ensuring that the process of circulation checks are undertaken methodically and quickly apace with the technological advancements and also keeping in view the changing media environment. The Committee would like to be kept informed of the precise action taken in the matter.

Publishers demands on verification

Recommendation (No. 12)

18. In their earlier Report, the Committee had further recommended as follows:

“The Committee observe that newspaper bodies are facing difficulties as RNI has not been doing circulation checks on time. This in turn has directly affected the advertisement rates of publishers with the DAVP at the time of re-establishment of circulation after three years because DAVP insists on automatic reduction of rates, to the minimum rates, unless the circulation is authenticated by the RNI.

The Committee also observe that RNI carries out circulation checks through the number of distribution of sold copies to agents, hawkers, consumption, printing machinery etc. which the publishers find difficult to produce. The Committee feel that the verification should not lead to harassment so that publishers take to dubious methods of concealing their actual circulation. The Committee also feel that RNI should be regular in issuing the circulation certification so that publishers are not put to trouble of automatic reduction of rates by DAVP in the absence of such certification. The Committee recommend that if the delay for issuing the circulation certification rests on RNI, there should be an understanding with DAVP that they should continue to pay the already approved rates till the RNI authenticates the circulation.”

19. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the parameters adopted by RNI for assessment of circulation claims require a few mandatory documents in order to confirm the claims by the publishers. The requirements put forth by RNI are the barest minimum in order to effect a meaningful verification. Any further reduction of documents or any other relaxation might hamper an effective check. RNI makes all out efforts to decide a circulation claim as early as possible. However, due to shortage of manpower and non-submission of documents by the publishers in time, the issuance of assessment certificate is delayed.

If publishers show promptitude in submitting documents within the stipulated time, the delay can be minimized even with the available manpower. Regarding the recommendation made by the Committee that the publisher should be allowed to enjoy the advertisements on the last assessed circulation, pending issuance of the new assessment certificate, the matter will be examined in depth and a final decision will be taken.

20. The Committee agree that there is a need for a proper verification of the circulation claims made by the publishers. However, their anxiety was that not only should it be done in a methodical manner, but it should also be completed within a reasonable time by RNI. In no case should it lead to harassments or the publishers resorting to dubious methods of manipulating the figures of circulation. They, therefore, desire that examination of their recommendations that the publishers should be allowed to enjoy the advertisements on the last assessed circulation, pending issuance of the new assessment certificate, be expeditiously completed. The Committee would like to be informed of the outcome of the examination.

Fee for title clearance or registration

Recommendation (No. 13)

21. Expressing their views on the need for imposition of charges on the services rendered by RNI, the Committee in their earlier Report had recommended as follows:

“The Committee are surprised to note that RNI is not charging any processing fee for performing various statutory and non-statutory function such as title verification, registration, bringing out ‘Press in India’, circulation check, issue of eligibility certificates for import of newsprint, essentiality certificate for import of printing machinery etc. They find no reason why RNI should not charge for these services.

The Committee further note that the Expenditure Reforms Commission had recommended imposing some service charges for various services rendered by RNI and a proposal thereof was formulated by RNI. However, when the Ministry of Law, Department of Legal Affairs was consulted, they opined that the PBR Act does not provide for fee for discharging statutory functions and therefore fee cannot be charged without amending the Act.

The Committee feel that the proposal of imposition of fee for various statutory and non-statutory functions of RNI is a step in right direction and it should be actively considered by the Ministry. The Committee, therefore, desire the necessary amendments in the provisions of PRB Act should be made in this respect.”

22. The Ministry in their reply have stated that the proposed amendments in the PRB Act 1867 include provision for prescribing a fee for getting a new title as well as for re-verification of titles.

23. The Committee note that the proposed amendments in the PRB Act 1867 include provisions for prescribing fees for getting new titles and for re-verification of titles. They, however, regret to note that the Ministry’s reply is silent about the proposals for charging a fee in respect of the other functions such as registration, circulation check, issue of eligibility certificates, etc. The Committee therefore, desire that the need for imposition of charges towards the services rendered in these areas may also be examined and necessary action taken thereon. The Committee would like to be informed of the action taken in the matter.

CHAPTER II

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS, WHICH HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT

Amendments to the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 (PRB)

Recommendation (No. 1)

The Committee are informed that PRB Act is an Act for regulation of Printing presses and Newspapers, for the preservation of copies of books and newspapers printed in India, and for the registration of such books and newspapers. The Act was enacted in the year 1867 and is still in force for the regulation of printing presses and the newspapers.

The Committee are also informed that the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) is the important organization, which is keeping record of all available information and statistics on the presses and newspapers in India. The Registrar of Newspapers for India performs Statutory functions as enshrined under the Act of 1867 as well as Non-Statutory functions as enshrined under the GOI, MOF (Deptt. of Revenue) Notification No. 21.

Some of the functions like title verification, registration, clearance of foreign title for newspapers, receipt of Annual Statements, deletion of names of ceased publications, verification of circulation claims, facsimile edition etc., requires changes in the original Act for their smooth functioning and quick disposal. The above process and procedures could be made more efficient and transparent by making the whole process on line by using the Information Technology. The introduction of Information Technology and its wide spread usage for the above function does not find place in the original Act. It has become very essential that the Act be suitably reviewed and necessary changes incorporated.

The Committee are of the strong opinion that the smooth functioning of RNI and its timely disposal of its functions is the key to redressal of complaints from the newspapers organizations. The Committee feel that this will be possible only if the Act is suitably reviewed and amended to suit the present day on-line environment. The Committee, therefore, recommended that the Department should make all out efforts to amend the Act as early as possible.

Action Taken by the Government

This Ministry has already initiated action for amendment of Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 to make it more responsive to the changed media environment. The proposed amendment to the said Act has been agreed to by the Group of Ministers. Accordingly, a Note for the Cabinet has been prepared for seeking its approval.

Recommendation (No. 2)

Opening of more Regional Offices

The Committee observe that RNI had earlier placed a proposal for opening up of regional offices in more locations in India but the same was pruned down due to administrative reasons. The Committee are informed that the bulk of the work with RNI lies in the verification of titles, which takes a long time. This delay is the cause of most of the complaints received from the publishers. They are further informed that this position would be tackled effectively, once the computerization process is complete.

The Committee are of the opinion that for opening up more Regional Offices more staff would not be needed and also more rent would not be required to be paid for accommodation etc. if the Computerisation and on-line registration is carried out effectively and in a time-bound manner. Till such time the possibility of entrusting the job of verification of titles to some other division within the Ministry e.g. Field Publicity Division may be examined.

Action Taken by the Government

Due to economy instructions issued by the Ministry of Finance, it is not possible to create new posts. However, an attempt is being made to synergise with Regional Offices of RNI without creating posts. Further, RNI has already initiated action to strengthen the existing computer infrastructure at the headquarters as well as in its regional offices. The staff are also being trained to familiarise with the new set up.

In the first phase, Radio Frequency link is being installed at the RNI Headquarters in lieu of existing computer system linked with VSAT/ISDN. This will improve the efficiency of daily work and cut down delays.

RNI is of the view that entrusting the job of title verification to any other Field office of the Ministry may not be a viable option as

the records will get scattered and consequently monitoring thereof by the Press Registrar will be difficult.

Recommendation (No. 5)

On-line Registration

The Committee are informed the National Informatics Centre (NIC) in consultation with RNI has developed software for on-line registration/verification of newspapers and it will take about two years to make it operational as the specific details are still to be worked out. The Committee is happy that RNI, in consonance with the need for the hour is taking a step in the right direction. However, the Committee feel that the time being taken for starting on-line registration/verification is on the higher side. In the opinion of the Committee, the facility should be implemented expeditiously. The Committee, therefore strongly recommend that all sincere and concrete efforts should be made by the Ministry/RNI to gear up its machinery to face the challenges to make the online title verification operational as early as possible. The Committee would like to be apprised of the effective steps taken by the RNI in this regard quarterly.

Although the Committee observe that amendment in the PRB Act is necessary in order to make the procedure for registration/verification of newspapers on-line but they strongly feel that availability of the information technology newspapers/periodicals title from the data bank should immediately be made on-line. They, therefore, recommend, that review of PRB Act, 1867 should be given top priority and provisions be made in this regard after suitable modifications in the Act.

Action Taken by the Government

RNI in consultation with NIC is under process to develop a software for providing online registration status. This Ministry has already initiated action for amendment to Press and Registration of Books At, 1867 to make it more responsive to the changed media environment. Since the process of verification involves consultation with district authorities and police it is complex and may take time to make it online. The process of registration after verification will be attempted to be put online with the help of NIC.

Recommendation (No. 6)

De-Blocking of Titles

The Committee find that for seeking registration, there is a provision that after the declaration is authenticated by the District

Magistrate, the publisher is required to bring out the first issue of the newspaper within 42 days in case of daily or weekly and within 90 days for publications with a periodicity of more than a week, otherwise their titles would be cancelled. However, the procedure of cancellation being mechanical and lengthy was not adhered to and resulted in blocking of titles. The first exercise to de-block unregistered titles was undertaken only in the year 1998, in which about 1.7 lakhs titles were de-blocked. Thereafter titles are being deblocked after two years. The Committee desire that de-blocking should be carried out more frequently and publishers should not be denied titles on grounds other than genuine.

Action taken by the Government

The process of de-blocking of titles for the year 2002 has already been started by RNI. Further, RNI is in consultation with NIC for preparing a software for faster deblocking.

Comments of the Committee

(Please see paragraph No. 14 of Chapter-I).

Recommendation (No. 7)

Refusal of title being same as a foreign title

The Committee note that one of the reasons for refusal of the title is that it is same as any published foreign title. This is being done as per PRB Act, 1867 and pursuant to Cabinet decision taken in 1955, which says that any Indian edition of a foreign paper is not allowed.

It has been brought to the notice of the Committee that Ministry of I&B is reviewing the matter in view of the fact that if there is a copyright of a particular item, it is not merely the name, but also the Mast head, Logo and many other things, if they are not the same perhaps the foreign title can be allowed. The Committee would like to be apprised of the decision arrived at in the regard.

Action taken by the Government

The Group of Ministers has in its second meeting on 12th May, 2005 has agreed to the proposal of the Ministry not to permit Indian edition of foreign newspapers. RNI refers the cases of title verification where the proposed titles are similar to known foreign publications to the Ministry of I&B. These cases are examined on merits by Ministry

of I&B and a decision is taken keeping in view all aspects such as Logo, name of title, content and Mast head etc. The proposed amendments in the PRB Act, 1867 will include provisions for dealing with such cases for foreign titles.

Recommendation (No. 8)

Annual Statements under the Act

The Committee note that under Section-19F of the Press and Registration of Book Act 1867 Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) is statutorily required to keep a record of registered publications including newspapers weeklies etc. As per the records of RNI the number of such registered articles is 58,467. This contains many publications that have ceased to exist but RNI has no information about them. One of the reasons put forward by RNI is that the publishers have not submitted Annual Statements, which is the basis on which RNI verifies the existence of newspapers.

The Committee further note that under the provisions in the PRB Act, 1867 Annual Statements containing details of publication, circulation, ownership, editors, price etc., are required to be submitted mandatorily by the publishers every year. However, during the year 2003-04, only 5591 Annual Statements from publishers were received by RNI, which meant that existence of 52,876 newspapers, weeklies etc. was in doubt.

The Committee observe that although the problem of non-submission of Annual Statements by the publishers is not new to RNI, yet it has failed to take any concrete step to improve the situation. No serious thought has been given to take any action against the defaulting publishers by imposing penalty of Rs. 500 under the provision in PRB Act 1867. The Committee do not accept the reason advanced by RNI that provision in imposing fine is a long drawn process and would only raise the harassment level. They desire that RNI should give wide publicity to the provisions of the PRB Act under which a fine can be imposed on erring publishers. Simultaneously, they opine that RNI should function strictly as per the provisions of PRB Act and wherever necessary provision of imposing the fine should be invoked to serve as an example to erring publishers.

The Committee also feel that the fine of Rs. 500 for non-submission of Annual Statement by the publishers is too low and therefore amendment to the Act for raising the fine to a level that impinges upon the pocket of the publisher should be proposed.

The Committee are happy to note that RNI took special initiatives like placing advertisements in various media and a network of receiving centers was provided for annual statements at various regional/branch and field offices of RNI, PIB, DFP and DAVP to improve compliance of filing Annual Statements by publishers. As a result, 7156 annual Statements were filed during 2002-03, which was the maximum number of Annual Statements ever received.

The Committee share the view of RNI that the situation of filing Annual Statements will improve when the procedure of registration will be on-line, as publishers would be able to fill a one page format even locally in any cyber-cafe. However they apprehend that this problem may continue even when the procedure becomes on-line because there is no stringent action proposed against those who will fail to do so. The Committee are of the view that RNI should take special initiatives as had been done in the year 2002 to give wide publicity to filing of Annual Statements by publishers.

Action taken by the Government

Wide publicity has already been given in leading newspapers all over the country during March 2005. Two advertisements were issued in all prominent national and regional newspapers, informing publishers about the deadline for filing their annual returns. In addition, a press release was issued through the Press Information Bureau (PIB). As regards enhancing the fine, it has been included in the proposed amendment of the PRB Act, 1867 to introduce a system of graded penalties.

Recommendation (No. 9)

Enhancing the minimum number of circulation figure

The Committee observes that there is a requirement of circulation of 2000 copies of a publication to submit an Annual Statement. The Committee further learn that the limit of 2000 copies is common for RNI and DAVP and if RNI raises the limit to a higher level, DAVP will have a problem because self-certification beyond 2000 could be spurious as DAVP gives out advertisements and a large number of publications may go to them with fake circulation figures to try and take advantage of this situation. Keeping in view the increasing workload on RNI, the Committee recommends that the circulation figure for filing Annual Statements should be revised upwards to 5000 and the benchmark for self-certification from 2000 to 5000 should be considered in consultation with DAVP. The Committee would also like

to recommend that the circulation figures should be taken as actual number of copies sold/circulated in comparison to the figure arrived at by calculating the number of copies printed etc.

Action taken by the Government

As per procedure, all publishers are required to file the Annual Statements irrespective of circulation figures. The only exemption is that the Chartered Accountant's Certificate is not necessary with regard to the newspapers whose circulation claims are below 2000 copies.

Additionally, RNI already has a process in which the circulation figures are the actual number of copies sold/circulated and does not consider the printed copies as circulated copies.

Recommendation (No. 10)

Deletion of ceased publications

The Committee observe that there is no provision in the Press & Registration of Books Act, 1867 for deletion of names of publications, which cease to exist. The Committee however, understand that the Ministry is examining the matter regarding deregistration of such publications which have not filed even a single Annual Statement during the last 6 years presuming that they are not being published, after giving a general notice. This would, however, not cancel the registration number, as it would require suitable amendment in the PRB Act, 1867.

The Committee are in complete agreement with the views of the Ministry/RNI and strongly recommend that there is an apparent need to amend the PRB Act by incorporating suitable provisions therein to give effect to deletion of names and registration of the ceased publications. The Committee recommend that pending such amendment in the PRB Act, RNI should go ahead with the deregistration of such publications which have not filed a single Annual Statement for the past 6 years. The Committee would like to be apprised of the progress made by the Ministry in this regard.

Action taken by the Government

Under the existing Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, RNI has no power to cancel registration of those newspapers/periodicals, which are not submitting their annual statements on time. Amendment has been proposed for de-registration of newspapers, which fail to

submit Annual Statement for two consecutive years. In case of default for three consecutive years, the title shall be de-blocked. The de-registered newspapers can be registered on a payment of a free prescribed under the rules. However, RNI has already initiated preparatory steps pending amendment of the PRB Act.

Recommendation (No. 11)

Verification of Circulation Claim

The Committee note that one of the important functions of RNI is to verify circulation claims made by the publishers. However, in view of the limited manpower available with RNI, RNI has confined the circulation checks to only cases referred to it by DAVP/PIB/State Govt. and some other undertakings. RNI also undertakes circulation checks on the basis of complaints. The Committee further note that out of the total 2658 cases referred in the year 2000, 2001 and 2002-03, 2628 cases were referred by DAVP, 5 cases were referred by State Governments, one case by PIB and the remaining 24 were miscellaneous complaints.

The Committee also note that the number of circulation checks done by RNI is decreasing year after year. During 2001, 2002-03 and 2003-04, 1679, 1304 and 788 circulation checks respectively could be carried out. Though RNI expects to touch the figure of 700 circulation checks during 2004-05, the Committee find that around 378 circulation checks would still remain pending. The Committee observe that the decline in the number of circulation checks is due to (i) the increased number of requests for spot checks received from DAVP, which has risen from 25 to 150 annually (one spot check takes time equal to six document based checks); (ii) shortage of staff (two posts of Circulation Officers & Accounts Clerks are lying vacant in RNI); and (iii) non-availability of trained technical experts who have to be hired from outside.

Effective circulation check pre-supposes adequate trained manpower to ensure checks to be carried out at least once a year. The Committee desire that for effective verification of circulation claims of newspapers, besides redeployment of staff within RNI wherever and whenever required, services of PIB officers and technical experts from outside should also be availed of. The Committee also desire that RNI should ensure that circulation checks are done within a fixed time-frame to minimize the problems being faced by the publishers.

Action taken by the Government

Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI) has already written to the Press Information Bureau (PIB) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants inviting their suggestions to streamline the process of circulation checks. To ensure that a larger number of spot checks can be completed every year, within a fixed time-frame, the matter has been taken up, for utilizing the additional manpower resources available in PIB and in its regional and branch offices. Further, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India has also been approached by RNI for suggestions of suitable changes in the current methodology being adopted by RNI for assessing the circulation of a newspaper, which is presently based on various inputs and scrutiny of documents.

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Paragraph No. 17 of Chapter-I)

Recommendation (No. 13)

Fee for title clearance or registration

The Committee are surprised to note that RNI is not charging any processing fee for performing various statutory and non-statutory functions such as title verification, registration, bringing out 'Press in India', circulation check, issue of eligibility certificates for import of newsprint, essentiality certificate for import of printing machinery etc. They find no reason why RNI should not charge for these services.

The Committee further note that the Expenditure Reforms Commission had recommended imposing some service charges for various services rendered by RNI and a proposal thereof was formulated by RNI. However, when the Ministry of Law, Department of Legal Affairs was consulted, they opined that the PRB Act does not provide for fee for discharging statutory functions and therefore fee cannot be charged without amending the Act.

The Committee feel that the proposal of imposition of fee for various statutory and non-statutory functions of RNI is a step in right direction and it should be actively considered by the Ministry. The Committee, therefore, desires the necessary amendments in the provisions of PRB Act should be made in this respect.

Action taken by the Government

The proposed amendments in the PRB Act, 1867 include provision for prescribing a fee for getting a new title as well as for re-verification of titles.

Comments of the Committee

(Please *see* Paragraph No. 23 of Chapter-I)

Recommendation (No. 14)

Facsimile Editions

The Committee have noted that RNI does not allow facsimile edition of newspapers published from different local destinations having almost the same contents with local specific changes to serve various localities with the same registration number. They have further noted that if a newspaper is transmitted through Electronic Technology to even some other destination and is printed and published from another city, publishers are not allowed to use the same RNI Registration number. The Committee feel that the Ministry may take this into consideration while proposing amendments to the Act.

Action taken by the Government

The proposed amendments in the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, which is presently under consideration, has taken care of the observations made by the Committee.

CHAPTER III

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS WHICH THE
COMMITTEE DO NOT DESIRE TO PURSUE IN
VIEW OF THE REPLY OF THE GOVERNMENT

—Nil—

CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH REPLIES OF THE GOVERNMENT HAVE NOT BEEN ACCEPTED BY THE COMMITTEE AND WHICH REQUIRE REITERATION

Recommendation (No. 3)

Plan Outlay

The Committee observe that there was no Plan budgetary provision for RNI during the 9th Plan. In the 1st year of the 10th Plan (2002-2003), Rs. 60 lakh were allocated under this head. The amount remained unutilised as the Plan scheme was not approved by the competent authority. Further, a proposed allocation of Rs. 13.00 lakh was reduced to Rs. 41.50 lakh due to redefinition of scheme and non-completion of the sanctioned work by CPWD in the year 2003-2004. The actual expenditure was only Rs. 36.73 lakhs. The Committee feel that there is a lot to be desired in RNI in the field of planning, as saving due to non-completion of work and redefinition does not appear to be good planning. It is in these circumstances, for the year 2004-2005 a meagre amount of Rs. 29.5 lakh has been allocated.

The Committee desire that RNI should undertake its budgetary exercise prudently and with due seriousness in a realistic manner. Plan development leads to improved quality and service. The Committee hope that the funds allocated in Tenth Plan for computerisation and renovation of RNI headquarters would be fully utilised as envisaged by the Ministry. They desire that RNI should make every effort to expend the allocated funds of Rs. 29.5 lakh during the year 2004-05 so as to improve quality of services rendered by it.

Action taken by the Government

The proposals for the financial year 2005-06 of the Plan Scheme 'Modernisation of RNI' has been prepared and is under process for approval.

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Paragraph No. 8 of Chapter-I)

Recommendation (No. 4)

Verification of Titles

The Committee note that as per provision of PRB Act, 1867 applications for title verification are received by RNI through District Magistrates. The DM first verifies the details and sends the application to RNI in Delhi. RNI then verifies the availability of the titles. The Committee note that a lot of time is being consumed in this process causing great inconvenience to the publishers who keep waiting for title clearance to start a publication.

The Committee are aware that DMs have a number of important assignments apart from maintaining law and order in the Districts. Hence, it may not be possible for the DMs to give priority to the work assigned to them by RNI. The Committee, therefore, desired that for expeditious disposal of work, the existing procedure may be modified to the extent under which the publisher applies to the DM with a copy of the same endorsed to RNI so that RNI can at once start the job of title clearance subject to verification of other details from the District Magistrates. The Committee also desire that the Ministry should concentrate on expediting the on-line registration process to simplify the procedure.

Action taken by the Government

The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 does not permit Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) to accept the application directly from the publisher for verification of titles and these have to be routed through concerned District Magistrates (DM) only. However, RNI has implemented online checking of title status by the publishers. Besides this, as per the Citizen's Charter the following time limits have been set:

- (a) Title Clearance-21 days from the day it is received in the RNI office from the DM's Office.
- (b) Registration-Response must be given in 45 days from the day papers are received in RNI.
- (c) Circulation-Decision in two months from the date all papers are received in RNI.

Also, RNI, in consultation with National Informatics Centre (NIC) is developing a software for updated application status for registration online.

Comments of the Committee

(Please see Paragraph No. 11 of Chapter-I)

Recommendation (No. 12)

Publishers' demands on verification

The Committee observe that newspaper bodies are facing difficulties as RNI has not been doing circulation checks on time. This in turn has directly affected the advertisement rates of publishers with the DAVP at the time of re-establishment of circulation after three years because DAVP insists on automatic reduction of rates, to the minimum rates, unless the circulation is authenticated by the RNI.

The Committee also observe that RNI carries out circulation checks through the number of distribution of sold copies to agents, hawkers, consumption, printing machinery etc. which the publishers find difficult to produce. The Committee feel that the verification should not lead to harassment so that publishers take to dubious methods of concealing their actual circulation. The Committee also feel that RNI should be regular in issuing the circulation certification so that publishers are not put to trouble of automatic reduction of rates by DAVP in the absence of such certification. The Committee recommend that if the delay for issuing the circulation certification rests on RNI, there should be an understanding with DAVP that they should continue to pay the already approved rates till the RNI authenticates the circulation.

Action taken by the Government

The parameters adopted by RNI for assessment of circulation claims require a few mandatory documents in order to confirm the claims by the publishers. The requirements put forth by RNI are the barest minimum in order to effect a meaningful verification. Any further reduction of documents or any other relaxation might hamper an effective check. RNI makes all out efforts to decide a circulation claim as early as possible. However, due to shortage of manpower and non-submission of documents by the publishers in time, the issuance of assessment certificate is delayed.

If publishers show promptitude in submitting documents within the stipulated time, the delay can be minimized even with the available manpower. Regarding the recommendation made by the Committee that the publisher should be allowed to enjoy the advertisements on

the last assessed circulation, pending issuance of the new assessment certificate, the matter will be examined in depth and a final decision will be taken.

Comments of the Committee

(Please *see* Paragraph No. 20 of Chapter I)

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS/OBSERVATIONS IN RESPECT OF WHICH
THE REPLIES ARE INTERIM IN NATURE

—NIL—

NEW DELHI;
16 December, 2005
25 Agrahayana, 1927 (Saka)

M.M. PALLAM RAJU,
Chairman,
Standing Committee on
Information Technology.

ANNEXURE I

MINUTES OF THE THIRTEENTH SITTING OF THE STANDING
COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (2005-2006)

The Committee sat on Thursday, 15 December, 2005 in Committee
Room No. '139', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Shri M.M. Pallam Raju — *Chairman*

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Mani Charenamei
3. Shri Sanjay Shamrao Dhotre
4. Shri Kailash Joshi
5. Dr. P.P. Koya
6. Shri P.S. Gadhavi
7. Shri Chandra Sekhar Sahu
8. Shri Tathagata Satpathy
9. Shri K.V. Thangka Balu

Rajya Sabha

10. Shri Dara Singh
11. Shri K. Rama Mohana Rao

SECRETARIAT

1. Shri P. Sreedharan — *Joint Secretary*
2. Shri Raj Shekhar Sharma — *Director*
3. Shri K.L. Arora — *Under Secretary*
4. Shri Hoti Lal — *Assistant Director*

ANNEXURE II

[Vide Paragraph No. 5 of Introduction]

ANALYSIS OF ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT ON THE
NINETEENTH REPORT (FOURTEENTH LOK SABHA)

- (i) Recommendations/Observations which have been accepted by
the Government:

Paragraph Nos. 1, 2, 5-11, 13, 14

Total : 11

Percentage : 78.57%

- (ii) Recommendations/Observations which the Committee do not
desire to pursue in view of the replies of the Government:

Paragraph Nos. Nil

Total : Nil

Percentage : Nil

- (iii) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which the replies
of the Government have not been accepted by the Committee
and which require reiteration:

Paragraph Nos. 3, 4, 12

Total : 3

Percentage : 21.43%

- (iv) Recommendations/Observations in respect of which the replies
are of interim nature:

Paragraph No. Nil

Total : Nil

Percentage : Nil