ISBN and HRD

Why in news?

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ISBN International Agency has threatened the HRD ministry to revoke the ministry’s appointment as the agency for issuing ISBNs in India.

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What is ISBN?

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- International Standard Book Number (ISBNs) is a unique 13-digit code, usually found on the back cover of a book above the barcode.
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- It is used by buyers to identify books.
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- ISBN is not mandatory to publish a book.
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- But it has become an indispensable sales tool as bookstores.
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- e.g Merely coding the language of publication into the ISBN is known to increase sales. Distributors, bookstore chains and citation databases will not accept a book without an ISBN.
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- The method of assigning an ISBN is nation-based and varies from country to country.
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- In India, the Raja Rammohun Roy National Agency (RRMRNA), under the HRD Ministry, has been entrusted with this task.
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What is the problem?

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- Last year, the HRD Ministry digitised the allotment of ISBNs.
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- Publishers complain that this move has inexplicably slowed down publishing in India.
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- The new online application system has also raised fears of censorship, with the ministry seeking details of each book before issuing ISBNs.
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- e.g Publishers have to provide the book jacket, which carries synopsis and blurbs from authors.
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What should be done?

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- The ISBN is purely taxonomic and the issuer is not supposed to have a regulatory function.
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- If there is a problem in the quality of a book, it should be tested in a court of law.
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- The government should divest itself of this function and devolve it to a private agency.
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Source: The Indian Express

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