

Vice President's Secretariat

## **Journalism is a pious mission for the cause of nation – Vice President**

**The press playing an outstanding role in empowering the people**

**Stresses upon maintaining objectivity, fairness and accuracy in news**

**Freedom and responsibility cannot be considered as inseparable**

**Businessmen and politicians setting up newspapers & TV channels to further their interests - VP**

**Calls upon media bodies to come out with a code of conduct for journalists**

**Appeals to media to provide greater space to development news**

**Asks Indian journalistic community to convey right facts to the world on Kashmir**

**Awards the winners of 'National Awards for Excellence in Journalism 2019'**

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The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu today urged the media to not color news with views and stressed the need to maintain objectivity, fairness and accuracy. “The neutrality and sanctity of newsrooms should be upheld at all times”, he said.

Speaking at an event organized by Press Council of India on the occasion of National Press Day, in New Delhi today, he said that the cardinal principle of journalism is to present fair,

objective, accurate and balanced information to the reader and viewer without journalists assuming the role of the gatekeepers.

The Vice President further said that this has become all the more critical in the present times after the advent of the 'fake news' phenomenon and the huge impact the social media is creating. "Sensationalism, biased coverage and paid news have become the modern-day afflictions of the media, he said adding that under no circumstances can slanted and opinionated reporting be termed as 'interpretative reporting'.

Shri Naidu expressed concern over the fact that business groups and even political parties setting up newspapers and TV channels to further their interests. "With this the core values of journalism are getting eroded", he said.

Maintaining that freedom and responsibility cannot be considered as inseparable, he opined that media must not only act as the watchdog to protect democracy but must also act as the true champion of the underdog. It has to be in the vanguard of fighting the ills that are plaguing the society.

The Vice President said that media landscape has transformed dramatically over the years and so have the values of journalism. In the past, journalism was treated as a mission for the nation's service. Talking about the present state of affairs, he asked journalists' bodies like PCI to do a serious introspection.

Shri Naidu said that time has come for media bodies to come out with a code of conduct for journalists. "In view of the critical role journalism plays in protecting democracy and in serving the larger good of the society, we should strengthen this important fourth pillar by ensuring that 'truth' is never compromised", he added.

Noting that mobile phones are revolutionizing the manner in which we share information, he said every smart phone user has become a potential journalist. "No doubt, the internet and mobile telephony have democratized the availability of information. However, the glut of information is also generating fake news and fake narratives", he added cautioning that, "journalists must guard against such news and fake narratives as they can be used by vested interests to create dissensions and divisions in our pluralistic society".

The Vice President also appealed to media to provide greater space to development news and important sectors such as agriculture.

Admitting that legislations alone can not bring desired change, he called upon the media to play a positive role in creating public opinion on the need to eradicate corruption and social evils like gender and caste discrimination. "We have seen the positive impact created by the media in promoting the campaign for a Clean India", he said.

Talking about the abrogation of Article 370, he said that it was only a temporary provision which was removed by the Parliament with huge majority. He appealed to Indian journalistic community to convey the right facts to the world about Kashmir.

During this occasion, the Vice President also gave away the awards to the winners of 'National Awards for Excellence in Journalism 2019' under various categories. Eminent journalist Shri Gulab Kothari was awarded the prestigious 'Raja Ram Mohan Roy Award' for his outstanding journalism.

Shri Naidu also released three publications namely - the Directory of Press Council of India

since 1966, the updated Norms of Journalistic Conduct Edition -2019 and a souvenir, 'Reporting-Interpretation--A journey' on the occasion.

Union Minister, Shri Prakash Javadekar, PCI Chairperson, Justice Chandramauli Kumar Prasad, Convener, Jury Committee and Member, PCI, Shri Jai Shankar Gupta and Secretary, PCI, Smt. Anupama Bhatnagar were among the dignitaries who graced the occasion. Representatives from various foreign countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar also attended the event.

### **Following is the full text of the speech –**

"I am indeed extremely delighted to be amidst you all and share my views on the occasion of the National Press Day, which symbolizes the important role played by a free and responsible press.

It was on this day in 1966, the Press Council of India, a quasi-judicial body, started functioning as a watchdog body.

I am happy that several journalists in different areas are being honored for excellence in journalism today. My congratulations to all the winners!

Dear sisters and brothers,

Ever Since the launch of the first newspaper in India-'The Bengal Gazette' by James Augustus Hickey in 1780, the press has been playing an outstanding role in empowering the people.

The press played a pioneering and stellar role in inspiring the masses to fight against the British during the freedom struggle and in strengthening the democratic foundations in the country since Independence. The nationalist role played by the newspapers and journals contributed in no small measure to influencing and moulding the public opinion during the freedom struggle. However, during the Emergency, barring few exceptions like 'The Indian Express', 'The Statesman' and 'The Mainstream', the response of the Indian press by and large was muted during the Emergency.

The blank editorial published by The Indian Express during Emergency, under the leadership of Ramnath ji, was perhaps one of the strongest protests ever published against censorship in India.

It spoke more loudly than any words could have.

When asked about his fight for the truth in the face of stiff resistance, Ramnath Goenka ji was reported to have said : "I had two options--to listen to the dictates of my heart or my purse. I chose to listen to my heart".

The media landscape has transformed dramatically over the years and so have the values of journalism. In the past, journalism was treated as a mission and those who wielded the pen were committed to ethics and highest standards of journalism. They used to work with undiminished enthusiasm and were overzealous in protecting its values.

The topic chosen for discussion on National Press Day this year--"Reporting-Interpretation--A journey" is quite appropriate. News used to be news in the past and it was neither interpreted nor misinterpreted. News and views were easily distinguishable.

The times have changed and so have the trends. These days, there appears to be a very thin

dividing line between news and views. The news story is not only interpreted in tune with the management's line of thinking, but the treatment it gets conveys a lot.

Occasionally, we do find that even important and newsworthy developments do not merit place on the front page and are rather buried in the inside pages.

The cardinal principle of journalism is to present fair, objective, accurate and balanced information to the reader and viewer without journalists assuming the role of the gatekeepers.

Fortunately for us there are a number of journalists who follow these principles. And that is what makes the Indian media so credible and unshackled by constraints.

However, there are aberrations like in any system. It is one thing to provide an insightful analysis of a news development by substantiating it with facts and figures and another thing to build a story on conjecture. The essential challenge is when this trend tends to become a new normal. Under no circumstances can slanted and opinionated reporting be termed as "interpretative reporting".

Perhaps, it would be appropriate here to recall the views of Mahatma Gandhi on newspapers. He had said: "One of the objects of a newspaper is to understand popular feeling and to give expression to it; another is to arouse among the people certain desirable sentiments; and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects."

Instead of giving expression to popular feeling, some newspapers these days are giving expression to coloured and partisan views. For instance, reading any one major newspaper in the past used to give a fairly good understanding of what was happening around the country and the world. But it is not the case now. One will have to read a minimum of four to five major newspapers to get a complete sense of the current developments. Same is the case with the news channels.

Time and again, I have urged the media to not color news with views and stressed the need to maintain objectivity, fairness and accuracy. The neutrality and sanctity of newsrooms should be upheld at all times.

This has become all the more critical in the present times after the advent of the 'fake news' phenomenon and the huge impact the social media is creating.

With the electronic and social media providing news by the minute with alerts and flashes on smart phones, journalists will have to exercise greater caution and guard against 'fake news', disinformation and misinformation.

Sensationalism, biased coverage and "paid news" have become the modern-day afflictions of the media.

With business groups and even political parties setting up newspapers and TV channels to further their interests, the core values of journalism are getting eroded.

Without delving further into the reasons for the present state of affairs, I would like journalists' bodies like yours to do a serious introspection.

In such a context, freedom and responsibility of the media acquire far greater significance than ever before. Freedom and responsibility cannot be considered as inseparable and are inter-dependent on each other. The media has the onerous responsibility to not only provide

unadulterated and correct information, but also educate the people on their rights as well.

It should also be remembered that freedom of media is not absolute and is circumscribed by certain reasonable restrictions relating to security of State, public order, decency or morality, defamation and contempt of court and sovereignty and integrity of India.

It should also be noted that during sensitive developments, vested interests use the social media to spread fake news and disinformation.

Finally, media must not only act as the watchdog to protect democracy but must also act as the true champion of the underdog. It has to be in the vanguard of fighting the ills that are plaguing the society.

The media must also provide greater space to development news and important sectors such as agriculture.

Since the press has the power to influence public opinion, the credibility of newspapers in particular and the media in general is extremely crucial. A newspaper with credibility will gain the trust of the readers and has the chance to establish long-standing relationship with them.

In view of the huge influence in shaping the public opinion, the role of mass media assumes greater significance in the present era. It can play a positive role in creating public opinion on the need to eradicate corruption and social evils like gender and caste discrimination. The investigative journalism that uncovered the Watergate scandal and the subsequent downfall of an American President is still fresh in memory. There are many instances in which the media and of late the social media played a critical role---take the example of Egyptian uprising some years ago.

We have seen the positive impact created by the media in promoting the campaign for a 'Clean India'. Thus, I feel that the press, TV and even the social media must educate the people on important health issues such as lifestyle changes and growing incidence of Non Communicable Diseases.

Of course, mobile phones are revolutionizing the manner in which we share data, information and visuals. With the number of smart phone users crossing 450 million in the country, every smart phone user has become a potential journalist. In fact, there are many instances where smart phone users have become "citizen journalists and virtually provided breaking news alerts to TV news channels. No doubt, the internet and mobile telephony have democratized the availability of information. However, the glut of information is also generating fake news and fake narratives. Journalists must guard against such news and fake narratives as they can be used by vested interests to create dissensions and divisions in our pluralistic society.

Apart from enforcing self-regulation, the media must ensure that the core values of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, news worthiness and independence are never compromised. Instead of focusing on negativity, it is important for newspapers in a country like India to accord importance to development journalism.

Maybe the time has come for media bodies to come out with a code of conduct for journalists. In view of the critical role journalism plays in protecting democracy and in serving the larger good of the society, we should strengthen this important fourth pillar by ensuring that "truth" is never compromised.

I compliment the Press Council of India for its role in promoting responsible journalism in the

country.

Jai Hindi!"

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**VRRK/MS/MSY**

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