

Excerpts of PM's address on the occasion of the Platinum Jubilee of the Daily Thanthi in Chennai
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At the outset, I express my condolences and sympathies to the families of all those, who have lost their loved ones, or faced immense hardship in the recent incidents of heavy rain and floods in Chennai and other parts of Tamil Nadu. I have assured the State Government of all possible support. I also express grief at the passing away of senior journalist, Thiru R. Mohan.

The Dina Thanthi has completed seventy five glorious years. I commend the contributions of Thiru S.P. Adithanar, Thiru S.T. Adithanar, and Thiru Balasubramanian ji, for the successful journey so far. Their stellar efforts over the last seven and a half decades, have made Thanthi one of the biggest media brands. Not just in the State of Tamil Nadu, but in the entire country. I also compliment the management and staff of the Thanthi group for this success.

24 hour news channels are now available to millions of Indians. Yet, for many, the day still begins with a cup of tea or coffee in one hand, and a newspaper in the other. I am told that the Dina Thanthi offers this option today, through seventeen editions, not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Bengaluru, Mumbai and even in Dubai. This remarkable expansion over seventy five years, is a tribute to the visionary leadership of Thiru S.P. Adithanar, who began this newspaper in 1942. Newsprint was a rare commodity in those days. But he began the newspaper by printing on paper made by hand, from straw.

The font size, simple language and easy to understand narrative made Dina Thanthi popular among the people. In those times, it brought them political awareness and information. People used to throng the tea-shops to read this newspaper. Thus began the voyage, that continues till today, when its balanced coverage makes the Dina Thanthi popular, from a daily wage earner, to the highest political functionary in the State.

I came to know that Thanthi means telegram. Dina Thanthi means "daily telegram". Over the last seventy five years, the traditional telegram, delivered by the postal department, has become obsolete, and gone out of existence. But this telegram, continues to grow every day. Such is the power of a noble idea, backed by hard work and commitment.

I am happy to learn that the Thanthi group has instituted awards for promoting Tamil Literature in the name of its founder Thiru Adithanar. I whole-heartedly congratulate the awardees: Thiru. Tamilanban, Dr. Irai Anbu and Thiru. V.G. Santhosham. I am sure, this recognition will be a motivating factor for those who have taken to writing as a noble profession.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mankind's quest for knowledge is as old as our history itself. Journalism helps quench this thirst. Today, newspapers do not just give news. They can also mould our thinking and open a window to the world. In a broader context, media is a means of transforming society. That is why, we refer to the media, as the fourth pillar of democracy. I am fortunate today, to be among those who demonstrate the power of the pen, and show how it can be the vital life-force and conscience of society.

During the dark days of colonialism, publications such as the Sambad Kaumudi of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the Kesari of Lokmanya Tilak, and the Navjeevan of Mahatma Gandhi, lit a beacon, and inspired the freedom struggle. Across the country, there were pioneers in journalism, who often gave up a life of comfort. They helped create a mass consciousness and awakening, through their newspapers. Perhaps it is because of the high ideals of those founding pioneers, that so many newspapers established in the days of the British Raj, continue to flourish today.

Friends,

We must never forget that successive generations performed the duties required of them, towards society, and the nation. That is how we achieved freedom. After independence, the rights of citizens gained importance in public discourse. Unfortunately, over time we seem to have neglected our individual and collective sense of duty. This has in some way contributed to several ills that plague our society today. The need of the hour is to create a mass awakening towards "engaged, responsible, and aware citizens." The civic sense of "entitlement" must be suitably balanced by a civic sense of "responsible engagement." This should happen, of course, through our education system, and the conduct of our political leaders. But the media too, has a key role to play here.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Many of the newspapers that shaped the discourse for freedom, were vernacular newspapers. In fact, the then British Government was fearful of the Indian Vernacular Press. It was to muzzle vernacular newspapers, that the Vernacular Press Act was enacted in 1878.

In our diverse nation, the role of vernacular newspapers - newspapers published in regional languages - remains as important today, as it was then. They carry content in a language that is easily understood by people. Very often, they cater to vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups. Their strength, their impact, and thus, their responsibility, can never be under-estimated. They are the messengers of the intent and policies of the Government, in far-flung areas. Equally, they are the torch-bearers of the thoughts, feelings and emotions of our people.

In this context, it is indeed heartening to note that today, among our vibrant print media, some of the largest selling newspapers, are published in the regional languages. The

Dina Thanthi, is of course, one among them.

Friends.

I have often heard people wonder, as to how the amount of news that happens in the world every day always just exactly fits the newspaper.

On a serious note, we are all aware, that there is just too much that happens in the world everyday. It is the editors who select and decide what is important. They decide what should be given space on the first page, what should be given more space and what should be ignored. This, of course, casts upon them, a great responsibility. Editorial freedom must be used wisely, in public interest. Equally so, the freedom to write, and to decide what is to be written, does not include the freedom to be "less than accurate," or "factually incorrect." As Mahatma Gandhi himself told us: "The press is called the Fourth Estate. It is definitely a power, but, to misuse that power is criminal."

Even though media may be owned by private individuals, it serves a public purpose. As scholars say, it is an instrument to produce reform through peace, rather than by force. Hence, it has as much social accountability as the elected government or the judiciary. And its conduct must be equally, above board. To recall the words of the great saint Thiruvalluvar, "There is nothing in this world except ethics, which would bring both reputation and wealth together".

Friends.

Technology has brought about great change in the media. There was a time, when the headlines of the day, written on a village blackboard, carried immense credibility. Today, our media spans the entire range, from that village blackboard, to online bulletin boards.

Just as education now focuses a lot more on learning outcomes, our attitude towards consumption of content has changed. Today, every citizen analyses, discusses, and attempts to cross-check and verify the news that comes to him, through multiple sources. Media, therefore, must make an extra effort, to maintain credibility. Healthy competition among credible media platforms is also good for the health of our democracy.

Renewed emphasis on credibility, brings us to the subject of introspection. I firmly believe that reform in the media, whenever required, can only come from within, through introspection. Indeed, we have seen this process of introspection happen on some occasions, such as the analysis of the reportage of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. Perhaps, it should happen more often.

Friends.

I recall a quote our beloved former President, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam: "We are such a great nation. We have so many amazing success stories but we refuse to acknowledge them.

Why?"

I observe, that a lot of the media discourse today revolves around politics. It is only fair that politics be discussed at length, in a democracy. However, India is more than just us politicians. It is the 125 crore Indians, which make India what it is. I would be happy to see media focus a lot more, on their stories, and their achievements.

In this endeavour, every citizen with a mobile phone is your ally. Citizen reporting can be an important tool in the sharing and dissemination of success stories of individuals. It can also be of immense help in directing relief and rescue efforts in times of crisis, or natural disasters.

Let me also add, that during times of natural disasters, media usually does its best to cover various aspects of the incident. Natural calamities seem to be occurring with increasing frequency and intensity across the world. Climate change is a challenge for each one of us. Can media take a lead in the battle against it? Can media devote just a little space, or a fixed time daily, to report, discuss, or increase awareness about what we can do to combat climate change?

I take this opportunity, to appreciate the media's response to the Swachh Bharat Mission. As we strive to achieve Swachh Bharat by 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, I am touched by the constructive role that media has played, both in generating awareness and mass consciousness towards cleanliness. They have also pointed out the work that remains to be done, before we can claim to have achieved our goal.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

There is another key area, where media can play an important role. This is the initiative of Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat. Let me explain this with one example.

Can a newspaper, devote just a few column inches of space, each day for one year, to this cause? Every day, they can write one simple sentence in their language of publication, along with its translation, and trans-literation, in all major Indian languages.

At the end of the year, the readers of the newspaper will have been exposed to 365 such simple sentences, in all major Indian languages. Imagine the positive impact this simple step can create. Further, schools can be encouraged to discuss this in their classrooms daily for a few minutes, so that children too, are exposed to the strength and richness of our diversity. Hence, this step will not only serve a noble cause, but will also increase the strength of the publication itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Seventy five years may be a considerable amount of time in a human life-span. But for a nation, or an institution, it marks just a significant milestone. About three months ago, we

celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Quit India Movement. In a way, the journey of the Dina Thanthi, has mirrored the rise of India as a young, vibrant nation.

Speaking in Parliament on that day, I gave a call for creating a New India by 2022. An India that is free from the evils of corruption, casteism, communalism, poverty, illiteracy, and disease. The next five years must be about Sankalp se Siddhi - accomplishment through resolve. Only then can we create the India of the dreams of our freedom fighters. As a newspaper that was born when the nation embraced the Quit India Movement, may I suggest that the Dina Thanthi has a special responsibility in this regard. I hope that you will use this opportunity, to reflect upon what you can do for your readers, or for the people of India, over the next five years.

Even beyond the immediate target of five years, perhaps on the occasion of its platinum jubilee, the Thanthi must think of what the next seventy five years will be like. What is the best way to continue to remain relevant, and serve the people and the nation in the age of instant news at the fingertips. And in doing so, continue to maintain the highest standards of professionalism, ethics, and objectivity.

In conclusion, I once again appreciate the efforts of the publishers of Dina Thanthi in the service of the people of Tamil Nadu. I am sure, they will continue to constructively help in shaping the destiny of our great nation.

Thank you.

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Media losing credibility: Venkaiah

Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu on Thursday said the media was losing its credibility.

Addressing the valedictory of the golden jubilee celebrations of the Press Council of India on National Press Day, Mr. Naidu said, "Credibility is becoming a rare commodity. One does not know what to believe. Reporting on the same event one newspaper declares there was massive gathering while another carries pictures of empty chairs." For a democracy to thrive, Mr. Naidu said, free flow of information was essential. "Democracy needs information and dissent but it does not mean disintegration."

"If there is self-regulation where is the need to go to the doctor? The Press Council of India is only for print. There is need for a single watchdog body for both print and television media," he said. He, however, added that "regulation should not become strangulation."

The watchdog was necessary to ensure that political and business interests of the owners of media houses did not affect news, he said.

"News is increasingly coloured with views that are consistent with the agenda of the management."

In the illustrious history of Indian journalism, Emergency was an aberration, he said.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani, in her address, said upholding press freedom was the responsibility of every government. "Voices of media shouldn't be suppressed ... even if politically I may not agree with these voices," she said.

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Present day journalists should follow core values of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, news worthiness and independence: Vice President

Present day journalists should follow core values of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, news worthiness and independence: Vice President

Addresses Valedictory of Golden Jubilee celebrations of Press Council of India

The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that present day journalists should follow core values of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, news worthiness and independence. He was addressing the Valedictory of Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Press Council of India, on the occasion of the National Press Day, here today. The Union Minister for Textiles and Information & Broadcasting, Smt. Smriti Irani and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that when the struggle to gain independence from the British began gathering momentum, the press became an important vehicle to inspire the people and voice their aspirations. He further said that several newspapers and journals, particularly the vernacular ones, played a crusading role in the freedom movement. The press was the main source of propaganda for the freedom fighters even as the British rulers tried to suppress it at every conceivable opportunity, he added.

The Vice President said that 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. He further said that the following Independence, the press in India continued to play the role of watchdog and held a mirror to people's problems and their aspirations. It remained one of the main pillars in protecting and strengthening democracy in the country, he added.

The Vice President said that the contours of journalism have changed over the years. He further said that Watergate scandal in the USA was a memorable example of how a free and fearless press can cause the downfall even a powerful President. In India too, we have had an instance in which a Chief Minister had to resign after the press highlighted a scandal relating to cement industry, he added.

The Vice President said that deliberate slanting of news, providing disproportionate coverage to issues, organizations or personalities, while relegating hard news to single columns or fillers or giving prominence to a non-issue that creates more tensions among people are some of the dangerous trends that have crept into the newsrooms of both the print and electronic media. He further said that the haste to beat your rivals or competitors should not lead to inaccurate reportage. Journalism is a noble profession and all of you as flag-bearers of this vocation must ensure that people are correctly informed and not become captive receivers of biased and partisan information, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

“First let me convey my hearty congratulations to all the winners of national awards for excellence in journalism.

The press in India has a long and illustrious history ever since the first newspaper, ‘Bengal Gazette’ was started by James Augustus Hickey in 1780.

When the struggle to gain independence from the British began gathering momentum, the press became an important vehicle to inspire the people and voice their aspirations. Several newspapers and journals, particularly the vernacular ones, played a crusading role in the freedom movement. The press was the main source of propaganda for the freedom fighters even as the British rulers tried to suppress it at every conceivable opportunity.

Several journals and newspapers rose to the occasion, including Raja Ram Mohan Roy’s Sambad-Kaumudi in Bengali in 1821, Mirat-ul-Akbar in Persian in 1822, Kesari, Mahratta, The Hindu, Amrita Bazar Patrika, Bande Mataram, Al-Balagh and Al-Hilal, Young India and Hindustan Times.

Undaunted by the ironclad restrictions imposed by the British, the press remained fearless and the same indomitable spirit continued to be a prominent feature of the Indian media ever since, barring a temporary aberration during the infamous Emergency when the press behaved like the handmaiden of the government. Of course, there were a few exceptions like the ‘Indian Express’, The Statesman and ‘The Mainstream’.

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. In fact, the press during those times was the main instrument of bringing together people from different backgrounds to fight for the noble cause of attaining independence. It indeed was the biggest mission for journalists, who left no stone unturned in propagating the cause of freeing India from the clutches of British yoke.

Following Independence, the press in India continued to play the role of watchdog and held a mirror to people’s problems and their aspirations. It remained one of the main pillars in protecting and strengthening democracy in the country, except during the period I mentioned earlier. Today, the media landscape is dotted with thousands of journals and newspapers, hundreds of TV channels and scores of radio stations. Of course, you also have social media, which has become one of the main drivers of information in the Digital Age.

Friends, I am sure you all will agree that the contours of journalism have changed over the years,

although it continues to cast a huge influence in moulding public opinion and decision-making by the governments, especially in democracies. Watergate scandal in the USA is a memorable example of how a free and fearless press can cause the downfall even a powerful President.

In India too, we have had an instance in which a Chief Minister had to resign after the press highlighted a scandal relating to cement industry.

I have cited these examples just to highlight the crusading role a free press can play in a democracy.

However, over the years, it appears that the core values which guided journalism in the past are not being observed and news is being increasingly coloured with views which are consistent with the line taken by the management of the news organization. Is this a healthy trend for a democracy? I don't think so and all of you, who have gathered here today on National Press Day must do a serious introspection.

Deliberate slanting of news, providing disproportionate coverage to issues, organizations or personalities, while relegating hard news to single columns or fillers or giving prominence to a non-issue that creates more tensions among people are some of the dangerous trends that have crept into the newsrooms of both the print and electronic media. This needs to be curbed so that the pristine role played by the press earlier is restored. Commercial interests alone should not become the motive for running a newspaper or news channel. I am not asking newspapers and TV channels to become charitable organizations overnight but some balance needs to be struck between societal obligations and business endeavors.

I feel the present-day journalists should return to the core values of accuracy, fairness, objectivity, news worthiness and independence. The haste to beat your rivals or competitors should not lead to inaccurate reportage.

In these days of sting operations, under-cover journalism and rapid expansion of social media platforms, I think there is a need to bring all media organizations under a single watchdog body with a new nomenclature.

Of course, the Press Council of India has been playing a major role in promoting responsible journalism in the country. With the changing contours of journalism, I feel that the time has come for prescribing a minimum educational qualification for aspiring journalists. This is absolutely necessary to ensure that the standards and ethics of journalism are maintained and not compromised.

Friends, journalism is a noble profession and all of you as flag-bearers of this vocation must ensure that people are correctly informed and not become captive receivers of biased and partisan information.

Thank You and Jai Hind!"

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