

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF PRESENTATION OF THE RAMNATH
GOENKA EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS**

New Delhi, January 20, 2020

1. I feel happy to participate in the Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards function. I am told that these awards were started as part of the birth centenary celebrations of the late Goenka-ji. These awards honour those journalists from print, broadcast and digital media who have maintained the highest standards of their profession and, despite immense challenges, produced work that sustains public trust in the media and impacts the lives of people.
2. In other words, the awards are meant to felicitate those who hold their pen for truth. I congratulate all the award winners and urge them to never let go of their pursuit for truth which is the only compass for good journalism.
3. When the Group Chairman, Shri Viveck Goenka, met me to extend the invitation, on a lighter note, he reminded me of the fact that I share my first name with Ramnath Goenka-ji. I said, yes, it is a pleasant coincidence in which, I am sure you all would agree, I have no role to play.
4. May I also add here that it is indeed an elevating experience for a humble Ram Nath to participate in an event named after the redoubtable Ramnath whose stories of fight against oppression and persistence for truth are stuff of legend. But what I do – and all of us must – share with Goenka-ji is his passionate nationalism. I ardently share his dream of a strong and prosperous India.

5. Fondly called RNG, he was a matchless media personality who influenced the country both before and after Independence. He was a businessman who had the canny ability to build an empire of real estate and utilise his wealth for public-service journalism. The hallmark of his endeavour was an uncompromising journalism of courage. A journalism without fear or favour; its fundamental commitment to truth above all else. When he suspended the publication of the paper during the Quit India movement, his editorial spoke of “the heartstrings, not the purse-strings”.
6. Over the decades, the Indian Express group has truly evolved itself into an institution which encompasses the best values and traditions of journalism. It has cultivated a culture of irreverence towards authority and sought to practise journalism by speaking truth to power. Goenka-ji left behind a rich legacy in the able hands of his successors who seek to carry his message forward.
7. As you all know, I was born and brought up in Kanpur, a city which once set the highest standards for journalism. Let us remember Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, an extraordinary journalist, who sacrificed his life to douse the flames of hatred during communal violence in Kanpur. As a journalist, his written words were not only prescient but also showed his deep concern for the marginalised sections of society.
8. Writing in the revolutionary newspaper, ‘Pratap’, which he had founded, he drafted what should serve as the mission statement for every journalist. Here I quote Vidyarthi-ji’s own words:

“किसी की प्रशंसा या अप्रशंसा, किसी की प्रसन्नता या अप्रसन्नता, किसी की घुड़की या धमकी हमें अपने सुमार्ग से विचलित न कर सकेगी। सत्य और न्याय हमारे भीतरी पथ प्रदर्शक होंगे। सांप्रदायिक और व्यक्तिगत झगड़ों से ‘प्रताप’ सदा अलग रहने की कोशिश करेगा। उसका जन्म किसी विशेष सभा, संस्था,

व्यक्ति या मत के पालन-पोषण, रक्षण या विरोध के लिए नहीं हुआ है, किन्तु उसका मत स्वातंत्र्य विचार और उसका धर्म सत्य होगा।

हम न्याय में राजा और प्रजा दोनों का साथ देंगे, परन्तु अन्याय में दोनों में से किसी का भी नहीं। हमारी यह हार्दिक अभिलाषा है कि देश की विविध जातियों, संप्रदायों और वर्णों में परस्पर मेल-मिलाप बढ़े।” [Unquote]

The sagacity of Vidyarthi-ji's writings was never confined by the narrowness created by humans. That was his journalism. In pursuance of his dream of a strong and united India, he sacrificed his life for peace and nonviolence, like a true disciple of Mahatma Gandhi.

Ladies and gentlemen,

9. I know that I am recalling a period when mass communication was still in infancy. We were then far away from summarising our messages in a few characters and spreading them faster than wildfire. Indeed, technology has drastically altered the nature of journalism.
10. Old timers would recall magical touchstone of five Ws and H (what, when, why, where, who and how) whose answers were essential for a story to qualify as a news report. In the din of the “breaking news” syndrome that has consumed the media now, this fundamental principle of restraint and responsibility has been undermined substantially. Fake news has emerged a new menace, whose purveyors proclaim themselves as journalists and taint this noble profession.
11. Technology has given rise to a new breed of journalism which stands in contrast to traditional journalism. This development has revived the old debates about the status of facts and opinions, about credibility and authenticity. What is desirable is objectivity,

which allows journalists to be open to facts, and present all sides of a picture. Fidelity to facts, digging for truth and keeping one's lens clean and sharp is imperative.

12. I am aware that journalists tend to wear many hats in the line of their duty. These days, they often assume the role of an investigator, a prosecutor and a judge – all rolled into one. It requires a great deal of inner strength and incredible passion for journalists to play so many roles at a time to arrive at truth. Their versatility is praiseworthy. But that prompts me to ask if such a sweeping exercise of power is accompanied by genuine accountability?
13. Ponder for a moment as to what Goenka-ji would have done, had he encountered a crisis of credibility on account of paid news or fake news. He would never have allowed the situation to go adrift and initiated measures for course correction for the whole media fraternity. There is no doubt that journalism has been passing through a critical phase.
14. The quest for truth is, of course, difficult and easier said than done. But it must be pursued. A democracy like ours deeply relies on the uncovering of facts and a willingness to debate them. Democracy is meaningful only when the citizen is well informed. In that sense, excellence in journalism grants full meaning to democracy.
15. If journalism has to remain relevant, it has to retain its sense of mission, it has to reclaim its values of honesty and fairness. It has to, 24 by 7, reinforce its compact with citizens: that it will not bend, that it will always fight for truth no matter what the consequence, and that it will remain committed to finding the truth without fear or favour.
16. Given such high ideals, it is a difficult challenge to sustain good journalism and also remain profitable. A section of the media has

then taken recourse to entertainment in the name of news. Stories exposing great social and economic inequalities are ignored, and their place is taken by trivia. Instead of helping promote scientific temper, some run after irrational practices in their search for eyeballs and ratings. But, I am confident that, quality journalism will prevail in the long run – the kind of journalism we have gathered to celebrate today.

17. I once again congratulate all the award winners and also their organisations that helped bring their work to light. I also congratulate the Express group and the jury members for promoting excellence in journalism through these awards. I offer my best wishes to the young journalists whose work will be celebrated on this stage in the future. To them and also to all other journalists, this advice from one of their greatest predecessors, Mahatma Gandhi, will serve as a good guide:

[Quote] “Always insist on truth, and urge it with humility and grace. I am a journalist of long standing. In my own way I claim to know my art well. ... I would therefore ask such of you as are journalists and publicists to curb your pen and tongue. Exercise the strictest economy of words, but not of truth. Restrain your expression, but not the inner light which should burn brighter with increasing restraint.” [Unquote]

18. I leave you with these words of the Father of the Nation.

Jai Hind!