

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
AT THE HINDU 'HUDDLE' EVENT**

Bengaluru, February 22, 2020

1. I am happy to be here to attend 'The Huddle' organised by The Hindu, a name that connotes not only India's cultural diversity but also covers a sweep of history which is unparalleled in the world in civilisational context.
2. The Hindu group of publications has been relentlessly aiming to capture the essence of this great country through its responsible and ethical journalism. I commend them for their insistence on sticking to the five basic principles of journalism – truth-telling, freedom and independence, justice, humaneness and contributing to the social good. I am borrowing here Shri N. Ram's wonderful description of these principles as 'Panchsheel' for The Hindu group of newspapers.
3. You all deserve appreciation for organising 'The Huddle' as a platform for the churning of thought on a variety of issues that concern people. I am sure that the nectar, that is, Amrit, coming out from the churning would benefit the nation and the world.
4. Let me tell you why it is civilisationally contextual to hold 'The Huddle' in this land. Long before the West discovered the benefits of democratic decision-making, Sant Basaveshwara, a 12th century philosopher endowed with extraordinary wisdom, had promoted a culture of collective discussion which was called 'Anubhav Mantapa'. This is remembered as one of the world's first parliaments where people were encouraged to speak their mind irrespective of their social status. This was also a unique experiment of gender equality as women were also encouraged to take part in discussions and express their views. We, the people of India are blessed to have sages like Bhagwan Basaveshwara among our ancestors.

5. Debate and discussion are internalised in India's social psyche to arrive at truth since time immemorial. They are means to an end. On a lighter side, I am talking about an era that preceded high-voltage TV debates! Even in this period of transition, The Hindu continues with its tradition of conducting informed debate through news and views. It would not be an exaggeration to say that The Hindu seeks to protect the sanctity of the printed word and holds fast to the ideology of truth.
6. There is no doubt that perception of truth is conditioned by circumstances. For example, we tend to describe the day's progress with the rising or setting of the sun. But we know that it is more of a popular and metaphorical expression than the truth. Through arduous research, we came to know it well that neither does the sun rise nor does it set. The conditions that cloud the truth's positions are effectively dispelled by a contestation of ideas through debate, discussion and scientific temper. Prejudices and violence vitiate the search for truth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

7. As one of the oldest newspapers in the subcontinent, The Hindu has contributed immensely to the nation-building. Fired by a nationalist impulse, six intrepid youth of Madras, barely out of their teens, founded The Hindu in 1878 to redeem our cultural pride. They challenged the imperial power at its peak and nourished nationalism. Since then, the story of The Hindu's journey is quite instructive for those who wish to understand the spirit of India that is Bharat. Readers too responded enthusiastically. For many in Chennai and elsewhere, the morning came to mean a cup of filter coffer and a copy of The Hindu.
8. One of this newspaper's avid readers was the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, himself. When The Hindu celebrated its golden jubilee in 1928, Gandhiji wrote, [And I quote] "I gladly add mine to the many tributes that will be paid to The Hindu on its Golden Jubilee. I consider The Hindu to be one of the best, if not

the best, among the Indian owned dailies throughout India.”
[Unquote]

9. Gandhiji's insistence on truth, that is, Satyagraha, was based on his unique understanding of truth. Gandhiji, as we all know, was a journalist too and edited a range of journals, in several languages, in South Africa as well as in India. His journalism was, journalism with a cause. Yet, he was deeply aware of the cause of journalism itself too, which is simply truth itself. That is why he cautioned against the superficiality, the one-sidedness, the inaccuracy and often even dishonesty that had crept into journalism. As he evolved from Mohandas to Mahatma, Truth – with a capital T – became his sole cause, sole quest.
10. Sometimes, dogmas and personal prejudices distort the truth. In the 150th year of Gandhiji's birth, let us ponder upon this question: Will it not be proper to pursue truth itself as the ideology? Gandhiji has shown us the path by walking ceaselessly in search of truth which would ultimately encompass every positive attribute that enriches the universe.
11. Today, however, we seem to be living in what has come to be called the post-truth era. I wonder what Gandhiji would have said about it. Of late, there have been attempts to give various shades to truth and define its stages as if some final truth exists beyond provisional truths. To my mind, such attempts are nothing more than indulgence in semantics. Truth exists in absolute form which cannot be eclipsed by blinkers of prejudices. It cannot be a case of 'your truth' versus 'my truth'. Truth has to be one.
12. I am sure that society has been moving in this direction to discover truth through persistent dialogue, argumentation and scientific approach. Let me cite one instance of how society has been transforming itself. Two weeks back, I visited the Kendriya Vidyalaya located in the Rashtrapati Bhavan premises for an interaction with students. I faced a volley of questions about fundamental duties, and many schoolchildren asked if those duties should not be made mandatory for citizens. I was quite surprised

when a girl student of class 11 asked if it would be correct to make it legally binding upon citizens to pay their genuine taxes, exercise their franchise, follow rules and respect constitutional entities. Such questions, asked without any prompt, are indicative of the new generation's yearning for arriving at truth through their own experience.

Ladies and gentlemen,

13. The world is now being shaped above all by information technology. It is so rapidly evolving that what was outright unimaginable only a few years ago has not only become a reality but has even lost its novelty! These trends have impacted journalism in all its aspects, from news gathering to delivering news to readers and finally making money to sustain the activity. The internet and social media have democratized journalism and revitalized democracy. This process is ongoing, but in its current stage, it has also led to many anxieties. The new media is fast and popular and people can choose what they want to watch, hear or read. But only the traditional media has, over years, developed skills to authenticate a news report, and that is a costly operation. I hope that we will arrive at the ideal trade-off soon. In the meanwhile, the traditional media will have to introspect on its role in society and find ways to earn the reader's full trust again. The project of democracy is incomplete without informed citizens – which means, without unbiased journalism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

14. Those at the helm of The Hindu know that their journey began with a huddle, 142 years back, for a cause. That thinking must also be behind naming the event as 'The Huddle' that covers a wide array of topics ranging from politics, economics, the environment and entertainment to gender and sports. At this conclave, speakers are invited to come together and form a huddle to deliberate and review the strategy for the benefit of society and the country. Implicit in this effort is welfare of the entire cosmos consistent with the philosophy of "Sarve bhavantu

sukhinah". I once again commend The Hindu group of publication for organising this conference that lays out a roadmap for posterity.

15. I wish my best to all of you. Thank you.

Jai Hind!