

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL
PRESS DAY**

New Delhi: November 16, 2015

I am happy to participate in the National Press Day commemoration being organised by the Press Council of India. I convey my greetings to all members of the Press Council as well as the entire media fraternity on this special occasion.

2. The subject for this year's discussion is "The impact and import of cartooning and caricatures as a medium of expression of opinion". I understand that the discussions are dedicated to two legendary cartoonists, R.K. Laxman and Rajinder Puri, who are no longer with us. I pay tribute to these two individuals who made immense contribution to the art of cartooning as well as public accountability and social criticism in our country.

3. The Press Council and the Kerala Cartoon Academy have organized an exhibition of caricatures featuring me for this occasion. That they have chosen this as a practical demonstration of the theme of this year's discussion, is both welcome and flattering. Cartoons and caricatures are good stress busters, for the viewing public as well as those featured in them. The cartoonist captures the mood of the time and his art lies in being able to lampoon

without hurting, caricature without distorting and to say with a few strokes of the brush what lengthy articles fail to express.

4. I have been the subject of cartoons and caricatures for many decades now. Until I stopped smoking, I was always identified in caricatures with a trademark pipe. It feels good to be able to enjoy and laugh at cartoons of oneself. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister used to repeatedly tell V. Shankar, the doyen of Indian Cartoonists, "Don't spare me, Shankar". He would often drive down to Shankar's house for a cup of coffee and a chat about the subject of the cartoon. This open mindedness and appreciation of genuine criticism is one of the lovable traditions of our great nation, which we must preserve and strengthen.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

5. I congratulate this year's recipients of the National Awards instituted by the Press Council for eminent journalists, news photographers and illustrators. Prestigious awards such as these are a public recognition, of talent, merit and hard work, by peers and leaders in the profession. Such awards should be cherished and valued by those who receive them. Sensitive minds sometimes get disturbed by some incidents in society. But, expression of concern over such events should be balanced. Emotions should not overrun reason, and disagreement should be expressed through debate and

discussion. We must, as proud Indians, have confidence in the idea of India and the values and principles enshrined in our Constitution. India has always been able to self-correct whenever such a need has arisen.

6. Freedom of the press in India forms part of the freedom of expression which is guaranteed by the Constitution as a fundamental right. Protection of this right is our bounden duty. In a democracy, various challenges will emerge from time to time. These should be addressed collectively. We must ensure that the letter and spirit of the law always remains a living reality.

Friends,

7. The National Press Day is marked every year on November 16, the day when in 1966 the Press Council of India started functioning as an autonomous, statutory and quasi-judicial body. The Press Council has the dual mandate of protecting the freedom of the press and ensuring that the Press exercises its freedom within the ambit of the ethics of journalism and the legal framework of our country. Over the years, the Press Council of India has played an important role in promoting press freedom and instilling public trust and confidence in the news media.

Friends,

8. The growth of newspapers and agencies in our country has its roots in our freedom struggle. The press in India has evolved, not through the aegis of the Government but due to the commitment of individuals who used it as a tool to fight the exploitative and oppressive policies of the colonial Government. Newspapers became the platforms for social reform movements across the country. It is a matter of pride that between 1780 until India's Independence in 1947, more than 120 newspapers and periodicals were launched in almost every Indian language. Each of these publications carried the ideals of freedom to the doorsteps of our people and spread the message of an independent India.

9. The first newspaper in India was the '*Hickey's Gazette*' or '*Bengal Gazette*' started on January 29, 1780 by an Irishman, James Augustus Hickey. This weekly political and commercial paper declared itself as "*open to all parties but influenced by none*" and its content included criticism of the British East India Company. James Silk Buckingham, the Editor of the '*Calcutta Journal*' established in 1818, was a social reformer and close associate of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. *Samachar Darpan* in Bengali founded in 1818 was the first regional language newspaper. *The Times of India* was born on November 3, 1838 as "*The Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*". Its Editor, Robert Knight used to upbraid British officials for their nastiness towards Indians and for doing precious little to eradicate India's poverty. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* was founded on February 20, 1868

as a Bengali weekly by Sisir Ghosh and Moti Lal Ghosh. It became instantly popular because of its campaign against injustice and inequality. It overnight turned into an English weekly from March 21, 1878 in order to escape the provisions of the oppressive Vernacular Press Act. *The Hindu* was founded in Madras in 1878 by the Triplicane Six - a group of law students and teachers; Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak founded the *Kesari* in 1881; Dadabhai Naoroji established the Voice of India in 1883; Bande Mataram was published in 1906 by Bipan Chandra Pal and edited by Aurobindo Ghose; Gopal Krishna Gokhale founded the Hitavada in 1911; Tribune was started by Dayal Singh Majithia in 1881. Motilal Nehru started the Independent in 1919 and Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian Opinion in 1904 in South Africa and Navjeevan and Young India in 1919 in India as well as the Harijan in 1932. These trailblazers became the conscience keepers of the country and through their relentless campaigns gave voice to the struggle for independence.

Friends:

10. Today, the influence, credibility and quality of our media is well recognized all over the world. The Indian media has grown in scale, reach and revenues over the years. Its significance has further increased with higher literacy levels and the revolution in communication technologies. New media has brought about a convergence between traditional, audio-visual, digital and social media. It has become a

powerful means for shaping the ideas, aspirations and behaviour of our people, even in the remotest corners of our country.

11. This entrusts media with an additional responsibility. They must act as a watchdog of public interest and give voice to the marginalized. Journalists must bring to public notice the array of ills and deprivations that continue to beset large number of our people. They must shape and influence public opinion even as they provide objective and balanced coverage of news.

12. Gloom and dark alone should not dominate news coverage. A conscious effort should be made to show what is noble and good in the society. It must highlight the positive and inspire change for the better. The power of the media should be used to reset our moral compass and promote liberalism, humanism and decency in public life.

13. The media has an important role to play in cleansing public life. For that, the conduct of the media itself should be above board. Independence and integrity are two sides of the same coin and it goes for every one of us including the media. Sensationalism should not substitute for objective, accurate and dispassionate reporting. While opinion is free, facts should be sacred. Caution should be exercised in passing judgements, especially on matters where the due process of law is yet to be completed. We must never forget that careers and

reputations take years to build but only minutes to demolish. It is said accusations appear in headlines, denial in small print and contradictions are hidden away amidst cheap advertisements. The media must realise that it remains always accountable to its readers and viewers and through them, to the entire nation.

Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

14. The media recognized as the fourth estate serves as a facilitator, protector and enabler of democratic institutions and processes. It is an important component in the fabric of a functional democracy. As India marches forward into the 21st century, it is extremely important that the free press of India remains strong and vibrant.

15. On this day, I recall the thousands of journalists who toil day and night across the country to provide access to latest and accurate information to the people of our country. The media fraternity of India are not only providers of news, but also educators who empower our citizens and strengthen the democratic framework of our country. I thank you for your service to the country and wish you the very best in all your future endeavours.

Thank you

Jai Hind!
