

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
ON THE OCCASION OF PRESENTATION OF THE RAMNATH
GOENKA EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS**

New Delhi, March 19, 2025

I am glad to be here with you for the Ramnath Goenka Excellence in Journalism Awards ceremony. These awards recognise and celebrate the best of our journalism. With this, we also honour the legacy of Ramnath Goenka, the founder of the Indian Express group, and a great icon of Indian media. He stood up for the freedom of press before Independence as well as after Independence. His newspaper refused to buckle during the Emergency. The blank editorial it published became a telling symbol of a free press as well as a sign of hope for the restoration of democratic rights.

Goenka-ji's audacity was guided by the values he must have learned from our freedom movement. Many of the great leaders of the nationalist movement had taken to journalism to create awareness among the masses. Mahatma Gandhi, of course, was a journalist too among the many professions he made his own. His first long imprisonment in India was due to his writings in his journal 'Young India'. Gandhiji said [and I quote], "The sole aim of journalism should be service." [Unquote] Goenka-ji's journalism was precisely that – in the service of fellow citizens.

For Goenka-ji, the idea of service was not limited to journalism only. His association with the Father of the Nation similarly extended to other activities too. In 1933, at a function where Gandhiji was collecting funds for Harijan upliftment, in the first bid for a casket worth Rs 15 Goenka-ji stepped forward with a bid of Rs 100. In 1935, when Gandhiji was re-elected as president of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, he said this honour

must have been due to his work of spreading Hindi in the South. He then named Shri Ramnath Goenka as one of the “custodians” of that mission.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of free and fair journalism for democracy cannot be overestimated. If the citizens are not well-informed, the democratic processes lose their very meaning. News media is called the Fourth Estate, because it plays a vital role in a modern State. As such, all of us have stakes in the health of this sector. With that concern in mind, I would like to offer some observations about some crucial issues, hoping that these remarks will lead to further discussion.

First of all, a thriving newsroom full of ideas is essential for the business of news. One of my illustrious predecessors, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, had once emphasised in this forum itself the necessity of a research wing associated with the newsroom to ensure quality and accuracy of news. It is satisfying to know that the Indian Express has a vibrant newsroom with a research team.

I also feel that news gathering, which is the soul of journalism, must be strengthened. You need to devote more resources in encouraging the culture of reporting from the ground. You cannot do that unless you have a viable ‘business model’ for the sustenance. Earlier, newspapers and magazines sought to offer qualitative reporting and analysis, and readers bought their copies. A sufficient number of readers meant a good platform for advertisers, who subsidised the costs. In recent decades, however, this model has been replaced by many hybrid models. Their success must be measured by their effect on the quality of journalism. It is true that there are only a limited number of sources of funding the world over. It could be the State or the corporate entities or the reader. While the first two have their own advantages and limitations, the third option of keeping the reader at the centre is the most preferable option. It has only one limitation: sustaining that model seems difficult.

I understand leading news platforms around the world have been grappling with this challenge for some time. As stakeholders, we all should work towards creating more awareness on this issue. I believe that profitability on one hand and the responsibility to the reader are not mutually exclusive; indeed, they can be complementary.

On the issue of content creation, we hope that we will soon reach a stage when malicious content will be weeded out, and the so-called post-truth will go out of currency. Technological tools are also being applied to that end. We can hasten that process with pro-active campaigns to educate citizens about these pitfalls. In fact, the hazard of deep fakes and other misuses of artificial intelligence compel us to sensitise all citizens about this critical aspect of news. The young generation, in particular, should be educated to spot the bias and the agenda in any form of news report or analysis. Developing that critical faculty among young minds is indispensable for the future of the nation in general too.

AI, meanwhile, is disrupting the world, creating new opportunities as well as new challenges in many sectors including journalism. Machines have already started compiling and editing reports. The day might not be far when they would be able to carry out most of the work of journalists. What they lack, however, is empathy, which will be the one ingredient that can help journalists beat AI. Journalism based on human values is not going to be extinct ever.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The work of today's award winners is characterised by such human values in one way or the other. It highlights their concern for fellow citizens and for those who are not in a position to speak for themselves. My congratulations to the winners! As journalism relies on teamwork, I congratulate their colleagues who too contributed to their work.

I am happy to know that the awards have a section on journalism in regional languages too. This will help highlight more ground reports from those regions of the country that are far from big cities.

The Ramnath Goenka awards have contributed to the process of raising the bar of excellence in Indian journalism, and thus enriching the roots of our democracy. My best wishes to all of you for keeping up the kind of journalism that matters.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!
Jai Bharat!