

SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA AT THE KALINGA-FCC AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM – 2019

I am happy to be here today to present the **“Kalinga-FCC Awards for Excellence in Journalism”** for the year 2019. At the outset, I wish to congratulate the awardees today and place on record my appreciation for the International Panel of Jury members who adjudged the winners for this year. I would also like to congratulate The Foreign Correspondents’ Club of South Asia (FCC) for instituting these awards and the Kalinga Institute of Social Studies, the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Training and their Founder Mr Achyuta Samanta for assisting the FCC to launch these awards.

2. **The Kalinga-FCC Awards for Excellence in**

Journalism were instituted to reward outstanding global journalists in recognition of their work on the Indian subcontinent for the world's leading media outlets. And I am extremely happy to learn that these awards are the first of their kind in India and South Asia and are comparable to the century-old Pulitzer Awards in the United States. I believe that these awards will help promote excellence and greater and informed coverage of the eight countries in South Asia that is home to every fourth human on the planet. This certainly makes your task all the more challenging.

3. Established in 1958 by a handful of foreign correspondents based in India, the FCC has now grown into an active Club of a thousand members, I have been informed. This club has been hosting

press conferences with dignitaries from India and abroad, conducting seminars and discussions, and arranging cultural events to promote a better understanding of India and other countries in South Asia. It is a matter of pride that FCC members today represent the world's leading newspapers, news agencies, magazines, radio and television networks.

4. To the Foreign correspondents present with us today, I wish to say that India is delighted to play host to you. And we are proud that several hundred leading media organisations have set up their regional headquarters here in India. It is exciting to learn that whatever is published or broadcast about India and South Asia globally will have been put out by one of you.

5. I am not surprised that today, the BBC broadcasts in eight Indian languages, and its bureau in New Delhi is the biggest outside its home country, the UK. And it is on the basis of what you write and broadcast that millions of your readers, listeners and viewers across the globe form their opinions about India and its neighbourhood. In other words, you are the world's eyes and ears, and the world depends on you to know what is happening in South Asia. This puts a massive responsibility on you – the responsibility of total objectivity, impeccable unbiased, supreme commitment to facts and thorough emphasis on news rather than views and opinions in your reportage.

6. To that end, I also wish to reiterate that **Integrity** and **Independence** are two sides of the

same coin and both should be equally important for our media, as for each one of us. I have said before and I wish to say again, that media, being ***the fourth pillar of democracy***, is bestowed with extreme power since it seeks to hold the three other pillars – executive , legislature and judiciary - accountable. Media is the mediator between the public and public servants. It has the power to shape public opinion. It has the power to give voice to the downtrodden and dispossessed. It has the power to ensure social justice and equality. It has the power to be the eyes and ears of the people. But, it also has to ensure that power is not misused.

7. In its inherent role as that of a watchdog of democracy, media draws attention to what is wrong. But, gloom and dark alone should not dominate news coverage. A conscious effort must be made to

highlight the positive and inspire change for the better. The power of the media should be used to engage in a nation-wide endeavour to reset our moral compass.

8. India has been the world's fastest growing large economy for several years now. We hope to maintain and improve our growth rate in the coming years to enhance the quality of life for our 1.36 billion people. Indian economy will be a \$3-trillion economy by this year-end and aspire to be a \$5-trillion economy in five years, and a \$10-trillion economy in a decade thereafter. This is a challenging task for a diverse country like India, where people speak 122 languages and 1,599 dialects, and where every fifth person is still poor. However, with all these limitations and far more in terms of socio-economic indices when we began

our transformational journey in 1947, we were able to overcome our odds and become the 5th largest economy through concerted efforts, especially during the last three decades.

While the four decades immediately after independence were spent in consolidating our impoverished economy and society through state intervention, the decades thereafter saw us opening ourselves to reap the benefits of our consolidation.

9. Our own development journey, with its unique characteristics has ensured that public as well as private enterprise has led our growth. It gave us the capacity to withstand international financial downturns even as we adopted globalization. It is again this uniqueness of ours that gets reflected in the fact that while newspapers are shutting down

elsewhere, they are doing quite well in India. We have a vibrant press. There are over 1,14,000 publications in India today, and their circulation is a staggering 488 million. And the world's largest circulated English language newspaper happens to be an Indian daily. With literacy increasing year after year, more and more new newspapers are being published.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

10. Through this platform today, I exhort the media fraternity to make a meaningful difference in the field of development communication. Ours was the first country to use television for education through Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) programme in the mid seventies. Today, despite the massive expansion of television and internet, the

educational aspects of the news media have been mostly ignored, although poverty is one of the major problems that our nation is struggling with since Independence. The Indian media therefore has a moral imperative to be at the forefront of shaping discourse about how to deploy media and communication tools for poverty alleviation programmes.

11. As the media landscape undergoes change, the media has assumed different roles of being a facilitator, protector and enabler of democratic institutions and processes. Our vast, varied and vibrant media is a national asset. The Media as a whole not only keeps people informed but also performs a very crucial function of presenting ideas and alternatives in the domain of policy formulation and implementation. The media space thus

becomes an important component in the fabric of a functional democracy by not merely reporting the 'dialogue of democracy' but also by taking an active part in that dialogue.

12. Over a billion Indians now have mobile phones.

Five hundred million Indians are using the internet.

There are 1,600 satellite channels; more than 400

of them are news channels. And India produces

1,500 films every year in 30 languages. Indian films

are becoming increasingly popular abroad, not just

in countries where South Asian Diaspora is

substantial, but even in countries like China. I

understand that it is a challenge to understand a

vast region like South Asia and to explain it to a

global audience. Quite a few of you make an effort

to understand India and South Asia by travelling in

the region and meeting people. And many of you

may be depending on what appears in the English media to form your opinions.

But I would urge you and encourage you to go around our region, meet people, see things for yourselves and present a true picture of India to the world.

My compliments to all our friends in the media on this historic occasion.

Thank You

Jai Hind