

SPEECH OF DR. NAJMA HEPTULLA, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF MANIPUR ON THE OCCASION OF NATIONAL PRESS DAY ON 16TH NOVEMBER, 2016 AT 1ST BN. MANIPUR RIFLES BANQUET HALL, IMPHAL.

Shri O. Ibobi Singh ji, Hon'ble Chief Minister,

Shri K. Radhakumar Singh, Commissioner (Information & Public Relations),

Friends from Press Fraternity,

Distinguished Invitees,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel so privileged to have this opportunity of attending the celebration of National Press Day today, organised by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Manipur.

It was the 16th of November, 1966, on which the Press Council of India started functioning as a moral watchdog to ensure that not only did the press maintain the high standards expected from this powerful medium but also that it was not fettered by bribes or threats or any extraneous factors. The basic concept of self-regulation of the Press Council was articulated by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Press Council of India is celebrating its Golden Jubilee on reaching 50 years of its glorious existence and I would like to mention that the Press Council of India is a unique entity that exercises an authority over the instruments of the state safeguarding the independence of the press. The Press Council portrays a responsible and free press in the country. This National Press Day is celebrated since 1997 by arranging seminars that are organised by the Press Council and today, the One-Day Workshop is on 'Reporting from Conflict Area, a Challenge to the Media'.

It is truly said that journalists are the crusaders of truth and are meant to report the full and correct facts of an incident which reflects all sides of the problem. And the mass media were born essentially as their vehicle to disseminate factual and objective information. Mass Media, both print and electronic, act as a powerful influence on how people view the world and in moulding their opinion of things. Here, I would like to sound a word of caution. A powerful weapon, perhaps more than ever, as it may be for dissemination of information or swaying public opinion, the mass media

should not be allowed to misrepresent or to control the news and to rule through manipulation. In this context, what strikes me as most important is a responsive and responsible press.

Nowadays, as we are aware, journalists working in different fields are filing reports on specific subjects and events. We get reports on politics, sports, scientific activities and so on and so forth. One of the most challenging of such engagements is reporting from the conflict area. In the recent past, the world has been hounded by several violent occurrences, perpetrated sometimes by the states or militant groups or secessionist groups. India, due to its vast socio-economic inequalities, diversity in class-caste composition, religion and so on, is infested with problems like political unrest and civil disorders or riots at few places. In this situation, the media has a very crucial role to help in finding an effective solution to prevent conflicts and even mitigate conflict situations through objective, well researched and honest reporting that reflects the views of all sides of the problem.

Further, even if not in the agenda, I hope that role of media in crisis situations – constitutional crises, political crises, economic crises, social crises, security crises and threats to the Freedom of the Press will also find reference in the deliberations. The role of the press is multifarious and a flourishing press is of cardinal importance for democracy to succeed. Press or journalism is often said to be the fourth pillar of democracy. It is vital for building and nurturing awareness of fundamental duties among the citizens, preserving rich composite heritage and tradition of the country and for promoting democracy as a whole. Media's role in arousing peoples' conscience to promote peace, harmony and brotherhood transcending barriers of caste, religion and interests is equally important.

We are all aware that the press media are the conduit through which the programmes and policies and thoughts of the Government are passed on to the general public. In this capacity, the press serves as the mouthpiece of the Government. The role of the press media here is two way – the opinion and views of the public also get to the Government through the press media. I firmly believe that the press could lend a major hand to development through constructive criticism.

When I was Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, I developed very good relations with media covering the Parliament. I always bothered about the facilities and comforts of the media people. My room No. 31 was always

opened to the reporters, both junior and senior journalists. I remember Rajdeep Sardesai and Arnab Goswami who were junior journalists and used to be often in my room for coffee or lunch. We should respect the dignity of our journalists as they are an important link between Government and people.

My special concern is for those brave reporters who report from war and conflict zones and I salute them for their bravery. We see every day on TV and read in the papers that they risk their life and safety just for us to be informed about those dangerous conflict zones. Now, even girl journalists are given these hard and difficult job. My hats off for all of them and also my prayers.

National Press Day on November 16, therefore, personifies a responsible and free press in the country. It is commemorated every year in a befitting manner by the Council. I am fully confident that the press in the state will uphold the dignity of the press and maintain the high standards expected from this powerful medium. I have also been informed of the problems experienced by the press fraternity while performing their duties. However, our press fraternity should not give in to threats and pressure at any cost and should stand upright with fortitude and integrity. This is the time to defend our ethos.

I thank the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Manipur for organising such a wonderful Press Day and inviting me to this mega event.

Thank you,

Jai Hind.