

Small and Medium Newspapers

44th National Council Meet of All India Small & Medium Newspapers Federation' at Hotel Mayfair Lagoon, Bhubaneswar on 5.9.2008

It is a matter of great pleasure for me to be with the distinguished office bearers and members of All India Small & Medium Newspapers Federation and inaugurate the Federation's National Council Meet. I take this opportunity to extend hearty welcome and also good wishes to you all. I thank the Federation for the invitation, which enabled me to share my thoughts and views on this august platform, which is continuously striving for the uplift of Small & Medium Newspapers in the country. I understand, this is the 44th National Council Meet and over these years, the Federation has grown considerably and also strengthened with practical experiences on its journey of more than four decades. National Council Meet provides the opportunity to take stock of the situation, the emerging challenges, new tasks ahead and also to introspect for setting future course of action in the service of the society.

It is a matter of pride for the state as this National Council Meet is being organized here. The presence of representatives of Small & Medium Newspapers across the country and their deliberation will surely benefit the cause of Small & Medium Newspapers and to get over their problems. I understand, that Orissa has not too large a share of such section of Newspapers in comparison to other states and this meet will do a world of good for them.

The Print Media or the Press in India has a very long tradition that made its beginning way back in 1780 with the publication of *Bengal Gazette*, the first newspaper, a weekly in the country. This initiative, however, later led to the awakening of the people to the advantages of the newspapers in terms of social and religious reform. During freedom struggle, it became a powerful medium to

propagate nationalistic feeling to fight against the British. Great leaders like Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were all great journalists also. Several newspapers which started with sole purpose of giving a boost to the country's freedom struggle have survived to this day raising the profession to the height of a mission. Small and medium newspapers are no exception as they continue to emphasize and carry the social responsibility associated with publishing with renewed spirit. Their contribution is indeed commendable.

India's newspaper revolution is unique. The country has become one of the largest publishers of newspapers. Today, newspapers are published from all the States and Union Territories. True to our linguistic diversity newspapers are brought out in number of languages and dialects. However, we find majority number of newspapers is in Small & Medium category catering to the information need of rural and semi-urban public. They have the advantage of knowing the local taste, I mean, the sufferings, problems, difficulties and needs of the people in a much better way than the big newspaper published from metros and big towns. They speak the language of the local people and are capable of influencing their opinion. For them, local and regional news assumes great important than national or international news which are adequately treated in metropolitan newspapers. In doing this, they have developed close relation with readers who in turn respect them as their friend, philosopher and guide. On finding their joys and sorrows and also names reflected in the columns of newspapers, they develop a kind of emotional and personal attachment to these papers. They also provide the link between the public and the local authorities for benefit of both the parties. It is now seen that the big newspapers are now carrying the regional supplement with the main paper but

small & medium newspapers continue to be ahead of them in getting close to the local people. They should not feel any threat from big newspapers; instead they can survive and thrive independently.

The benefit small and medium newspapers have done to the society is by strengthening the roots of democracy and also promoting unity and communal harmony with support of people from all walks of life. Gandhiji once said, "One of the objectives of a newspaper is to understand the popular feelings and give expression to it, another is to arouse among the people certain sentiments and the third is fearlessly to expose popular defects". Those sticking to this ethics are bound to get adulation from the readers, which in turn will help them to discharge the responsibility as the fourth Estate of our democratic polity.

Small and Medium newspapers in Orissa have a great role to play in the development and progress of the state, not to forget strengthening the unity and communal harmony. They should reach even the remotest cottage of Orissa. In Orissa, more than 75% people live in rural areas and about 47% are below the poverty line. Newspapers should focus on development aspects and there should be constructive criticism as well as appreciation, which should go side by side for the growth of a better public order.

However, one often comes across that small newspapers are being criticized for ignoring ethical values by indulging in biased reporting, blackmailing and even showing soft corner for a particular political party. But it does not mean that we would generalize all small and medium newspapers on that category. That would be incorrect on our part. As I said earlier, there are many who are still continuing their social responsibility associated with publishing with admiration and

appreciation. They should realize their responsibility as the watchdog of democracy and contribute to the growth and development of a just society.

The problems small and medium newspapers may be many but the problem arises due to small-scale production and lack of resources for continuous technological improvement in production processes is probably more significant. Small newspapers because of their low circulation and localized nature, often fail to attract enough commercial advertisements. It is very much necessary to take steps to ensure that small and medium newspapers become financially viable and have modern infrastructure with quality printing technology at reasonable cost. Exploration of indigenous production of newsprint with easily available raw materials and even from wastes should be attempted to lessen the procuring cost. It is heartening that the Press Council of India has recommended for setting up of Small & Medium Newspaper Development Corporation to promote and ensure development right from the beginning and also to ensure benefits for journalists.

There are disadvantages, but it is important for small and medium newspapers to overcome them and grow in order to become voice of the local population catering to their information, communication and entertainment needs. Their survival and growth is vital for the society and also for our multi-regional and multi-language country. With literacy rate rising from that at the time of independence and economic condition of people changing it is time that the small press would get benefit from this improved literacy and economic growth. It is for the small and medium newspapers to become the catalyst of the change and play their role as independent and responsible media strengthening the roots of democracy. They have to explore their path of growth with power of innovation. I am sure; when one is committed for a cause good to society he or she will definitely

succeed. Let Small & Medium Newspapers continue to uphold glorious tradition of journalism and help the growth of democracy in India.

With these words, I have great pleasure to inaugurate the National Council Meet and wish a very very productive and fruitful deliberation.

Jai Hind