



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

OF

MR. MOHIT JAIN

AT THE

83RD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OF

THE INDIAN NEWSPAPER SOCIETY

23RD SEPTEMBER 2022

THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCE

2021-2022

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen!!

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all to the “83rd Annual General Meeting of The Indian Newspaper Society” for the financial year 2021-22, being held today through Video Conference. This is our second virtual event of this kind, and I must say that I miss the warmth of personal interactions but happy to see that more members are attending the AGM. I hope that all of you are safe and healthy as the Covid-19 has not yet left our doorsteps completely.

I am proud to say that our Society continues to thrive and achieve its goals. Last year has been a successful year as we have, slowly but steadily, come out of the clutches of Covid pandemic and its economic effects.

Against the backdrop of recent geopolitical events around the world, we have witnessed significant changes in the economic landscape of our country and the world at large. Undoubtedly, this is the most challenging test we have ever faced. Having said so, I may like to add that the darkest hour always is before the dawn.

I must say that, during this difficult time, we should continue to stand united, strong and resolve to serve the readers of this great nation with authentic, verified and trustworthy news that makes us stand apart from other media.

The Government has made a number of announcements of relief, but we did not receive any relief in terms of economic viability for

the publishers. As per the World Bank data, growth in India's GDP in 2021 was at around 8.9 percent as compared to -6.6 per cent in 2020. As per the Government's data, the inflation is now under control and this is, indeed, encouraging for all of us. However, these indicators have not yet led to substantial increase in demand for newspapers/magazines across the country. It is pertinent to mention here that continuous increase in price of raw materials and other related costs have affected bottom lines of the print media industry.

There is thus an urgent need to explore new revenue models, effective cost cutting measures and above all to reinvent and improvise the content for readers. The Indian newspaper industry's growth will depend on futuristic and strategic thinking of newspaper publishers for up-gradation, technology adoption and competence building in their manpower and reach.

The Print industry also needs to emphasize on quality and credible journalism as advertisers have started to prefer their brands to be associated with credible news sources which is a positive trend.

The activities of the Society for the last year have been outlined in the Annual Report which is with you, but I seek your indulgence to elaborate on few issues which are of vital importance.

9th Rate Structure Committee: The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting constituted the 9th Rate Structure Committee and data/information/comments were called upon from the Society, in this regard. Your Society has submitted a detailed

representation to the Ministry elaborating that the current formula used in fixing the CBC (erstwhile BOC/DAVP) Rates does not capture all the costs involved in newspaper production and variable costs. From this platform, I urge the I & B Ministry that before placing the final recommendation of the 9th Rate Structure Committee, they must empathetically analyze and take into consideration the economic viability of the publishers in India, considering the current situation of inflation and GDP.

Customs Duty on Newsprint: The Indian Print Industry is also saddled with the double whammy of shortage of newsprint and on the other hand the prices of imported as well as indigenous newsprints have risen to an all-time high level which has created enormous financial burden on the publishers. In view of the severe crises in the Newspaper industry due to the effects of COVID-19, digital media, shortage of Newsprint, price rise and Rupee depreciation impacting the price of imported Newsprint, I request the Government for the withdrawal of residual 5% customs duty on imported newsprint.

IT Rules, 2021: As you are aware, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 were notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on 25.02.2021. The matter is still pending with the Honorable Supreme Court of India. The Court has directed a stay on all proceedings challenging the IT Rules and Cable TV Amendment Rules pending before the various High Courts in the country. Your Society is keeping a vigil on the proceedings and if need be, will move the Court at an appropriate time.

Registration of Press and Periodicals Bill, 2022: A draft of the amended bill “Registration of Press and Periodicals (RPP), 2022” to replace the existing PRB Act, 1867 was not made available to the stakeholders for comments. However, your Society took, suo moto, note of it, and approached the Ministry to share the draft bill of “Registration of Press and Periodicals (RPP), 2022”.

Investigation against Google by CCI: The Print Industry is facing stiff competition from social media giants like Google and Facebook that defies the conventional definition of media. Your Society has filed a complaint with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against Google. It was stated that Alphabet Inc. (parent company), Google LLC, Google India Private Limited, Google Ireland Limited, and Google Asia Pacific Pte Ltd are allegedly abusing their dominant position in the Indian online news media market. It was highlighted that the producers/publishers of news which are made available in digital format, are not being paid a fair value for their content, despite them having invested heavily in creating appropriate content for the customers, who search for news items using the Google platform. The CCI after examining the contentions of the Society found that prima facie these allegations of abuse of dominant position are under the purview of the Competition Act, 2002 and that it requires a detailed investigation.

Examination of ‘Anti-Competitive Practices by Big Tech Companies’ by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance: The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance Branch invited the Society to discuss the issue of ‘Anti-Competitive Practices by Big Tech Companies’. It was also mentioned that a

background note on the said matter may be furnished for the information of their members. Accordingly, your Society has submitted a detailed note to the Additional Director, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance Branch, Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Comments on TRAI media ownership Consultation Paper: The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) had issued a consultation paper on the issues relating to media ownership and comments were invited on the consultation paper from the stakeholders. Your Society has submitted its detailed comments to the authority specifying its contention that, since the beginning of this issue, the Society is of the firm opinion that TRAI has no jurisdiction or authority to issue the Consultation Paper in respect of Cross Media and Ownership restrictions and there should be no restriction on the Cross Media Ownership in the industry.

Fire Safety: I am happy to inform you that the upgradation work of firefighting system of INS Buildings, New Delhi has been successfully carried out by your Society and Delhi Fire Service Department has issued a Fire Safety Certificate to the Indian Newspaper Society Office, New Delhi as it deemed complied with the fire prevention and fire safety requirements in accordance with Delhi Fire Service Rules.

INS Bombay Building: It gives me immense pleasure to inform you that our dream project INS Bombay Building is nearing completion. You may appreciate that before taking the handover of the Building, a Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP)

audit has been carried out by your Society to ensure that all the deliverables are met. The audit report has now been sent to the Developers to carry out the observations made therein. I am sure that you will hear the long-awaited good news, very soon.

Challenges of Indian Press: Even though the Press is regarded as one of the pillars of democracy there are instances where the Press in India faces difficulties. Injunction and defamation suits are some of the common ways of censorship. The Society has, from time to time, taken up such issues and urged the authorities to deal sternly in these matters to ensure security and protection to the Press.

Now, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude for the cooperation and support received from my colleagues Deputy President - Mr. K.R.P. Reddy, Vice President - Mr. Rakesh Sharma and Honorary Treasurer - Mr. Tanmay Maheshwari.

I also owe my thanks to all the Chairpersons/Chairmen of Regional Committee & Sub-Committees and of course all Members of the Executive Committee for their support throughout the year.

I would also like to thank our veterans Mr. H.N. Cama and Mr. Naresh Mohan for their valuable guidance and support. I am confident that they will continue to extend their active support to the new team as well.

I also want to especially thank all the Members of this esteemed Society for their consistent support, whether through smooth sailing or turbulent times. On behalf of the entire Executive Committee of the Society, we are grateful for your continuing support.

Lastly, I convey my thanks to the Secretary General Ms. Mary Paul and members of the staff at the Secretariat for their assistance and cooperation during my tenure.

I thank you all once again for giving me an opportunity to lead this prestigious Society.

My best wishes to you all!!

Mohit Jain
President