



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Mr. Rakesh Sharma

AT THE

85th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OF

THE INDIAN NEWSPAPER SOCIETY

27th SEPTEMBER 2024

THROUGH VIDEO CONFERENCE

2023-2024

Good Morning Ladies & Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all to the 85th Annual General Meeting of The Indian Newspaper Society for the Financial Year 2023-24, being held today through virtual mode.

It is a privilege to address you today, as we come together to celebrate the strength and unity of the Indian print media industry. I must say that, we may be separated by distance but our collective presence is a testament of our powerful role in shaping opinions, driving change, and supporting the foundation of this great nation.

The print industry in India remains on a robust growth trajectory, standing in stark contrast to its decline in other developed economies. With rising circulation and readership, India has emerged as the largest print market globally. This remarkable success is attributed to the deep cultural veneration for the written word and the widespread tradition of daily newspaper delivery to households each morning.

You will agree to the fact that India is at a pivotal moment. The upcoming next few years are full of opportunities with some significant challenges. In this dynamic environment, the role of media, especially the print media has become more crucial.

As the Fourth Estate, we bear the responsibility to uphold truth, transparency, and accountability while navigating the changes transforming the print media industry.

Today, we stand at the intersection of tradition and transformation. The rapid growth of technology, social media, and digital platforms have drastically changed how news is delivered and consumed.

For us, this shift presents both challenges and opportunities. Hence, I request all the publishers to be agile, innovative, and vigilant in their strategic approaches.

As we embrace the digital age, we must innovate and adapt to the changing needs of our readers. Whether through interactive media, data-driven stories, or immersive experiences, we must captivate and inform our audiences.

At the same time, it is our duty to preserve the essence of print journalism.

Newspapers offer a unique and tangible connection that has stood the test of time. It provides depth, credibility, and a sense of tradition.

Therefore, we must continue to invest in quality print journalism to keep it a vital part of our media landscape.

Here I would like to add that in an era of widespread misinformation and fake news, our commitment to truth becomes even more vital. Our foremost duty is to pursue the truth.

I am sure you all will agree with me that we owe it to our readers. They trust us to provide the news/information they need to make informed decisions, and we must honor that trust always.

Having said so, Press freedom is the lifeblood of our democracy, and we must defend it at any cost. We must stand united in protecting the independence of the press, resisting any attempts to restrict our freedom to report, express opinions, and investigate matters of public interest.

Now, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the support of the present Government of India under the esteemed leadership of the Honorable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. The Government's focus on digital infrastructure, transparency, and inclusive growth has provided our industry with the tools and opportunities to thrive in this new era. The policies aimed at enhancing connectivity and promoting digital literacy have not only expanded our reach but also empowered publishers across the country. As we continue to collaborate with the government on various fronts, I am confident that

together, we can create a media environment that upholds the highest standards of integrity and responsibility.

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

Customs Duty on Newsprint: The Indian Print Industry has been hit hard by the dual challenges of newsprint shortages and high prices, both for imported and domestic newsprint. This has placed a tremendous financial burden on publishers. Your Society has been actively engaging with the Government to seek the withdrawal of the 5% customs duty on newsprint. We've repeatedly pointed out that domestic manufacturers do not produce 40 & 42 GSM newsprint. In light of this, I once again urge the Government to consider the removal of the 5% customs duty on imported newsprint.

9th Rate Structure Committee: The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting constituted the 9th Rate Structure Committee in the year 2021, and your Society, time and again, submitted all required data/information to the Rate Structure Committee. I urge the Ministry to carefully consider the economic viability of publishers in India, especially in the current challenging environment

and release the long-awaited recommendations of the Rate Structure Committee.

Self-Declaration Certificate: In compliance with the Supreme Court's order, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting mandated that all advertisements printed, aired, or displayed by advertisers/advertising agencies must be accompanied by a Self-Declaration Certificate. Recognizing the implications of this directive, your Society has sent multiple representations to the Ministry, highlighting the concerns and issues faced by our members. In response, the Ministry issued an advisory clarifying that only advertisements for food and health-related products and services need to upload an annual Self-Declaration Certificate on a dedicated portal. Your Society has also intervened in this matter and filed applications with the Supreme Court for further directions.

Investigation against Google by CCI: Your Society has filed a complaint with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against Google, alleging that it is abusing its dominant position in the Indian online news media market. We have highlighted that news publishers who make their content available digitally are not being fairly compensated, despite significant investments in content creation. The CCI, after reviewing our complaint, found

that these allegations of abuse of dominance warrant a detailed investigation under the Competition Act, 2002.

GST on Digital News Subscription: We have requested the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to exempt digital news subscriptions from GST. The Ministry has informed us that they have taken up this matter with the Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance, following our request.

QR Code for NHAI Advertisements: The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has issued a directive requiring QR Codes in 3A & 3D Notifications Published in Newspapers under The National Highways Act, 1956. Our Society has communicated with the Ministry, suggesting that they consider publishing the complete advertisement in newspapers and making it available on their official website. This would ensure broader coverage and accessibility, especially for those who may not be technologically proficient.

INS Towers, Mumbai: It gives me an immense pleasure to inform you that INS Towers, B-Wing, located in the vibrant Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai has been inaugurated by the Honorable Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi on 13.07.2024. The event was a resounding success. It was attended by the Governor of Maharashtra, Mr. Ramesh Bais, Chief Minister of

Maharashtra, Mr. Eknath Shinde, Deputy Chief Ministers of Maharashtra, Mr. Devendra Fadnavis, Mr. Ajit Pawar along with Other Dignitaries, Industry Leaders, and Members of the print media fraternity. INS Towers, B-Wing, is set to become a landmark in Mumbai's print media sector. Its strategic location in BKC, coupled with state-of-the-art facilities, positions itself as an ideal hub for the print media. This building symbolizes the Indian Newspaper Society's unwavering commitment to the print media industry and marks a significant milestone in our journey.

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. M. V. Shreyams Kumar, Vice President - Mr. Vivek Gupta 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 industry's veteran Mr. H. N. Cama for his valuable guidance and support. I am confident that he will continue to extend his 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.

Finally, 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to lead this prestigious Society. I wish you all continued success in the years to come.

Rakesh Sharma

President