

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF 125TH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS OF THE MALAYALA MANORAMA**

Kottayam, Kerala : 16-03-2013

It gives me great pleasure to be in Kottayam to inaugurate the 125th Anniversary celebrations of Malayala Manorama, one of the great newspapers of India. I would like to extend my hearty congratulations to Shri Mammen Mathew and all members of the Malayala Manorama Group on attaining this major milestone in its journey.

In the last 125 years, the Manorama has reported on colonialism giving way to independence, self-sufficiency replacing hunger and deprivation, political emancipation evolving into a strong, mature democracy and the emergence of India as a major political and economic force in the world. Over the years, the Manorama has not just chronicled India's amazing journey, it has also been an active participant in the process of bringing significant change in our country.

I am happy to know that the Malayala Manorama which started with less than a thousand copies is now published from 18 centres including 2 centres abroad and has a circulation of 21.29 lakhs with around 97.52 lakh readers.

Started in 1888, in this small town of Kottayam, Malayala Manorama is now an international media brand with a notable presence in the cyber world and electronic media. Manorama now reaches the drawing room of Malayalam readers across the world and Manorama publications come out in various

languages including I believe the YEAR BOOK which has a Bengali version.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kerala has been a pioneer and a path-breaker in many fields. Near universal literacy and enrolment in schools has been achieved. Fertility rate of its people has declined below replacement level. The overall sex ratio is in favour of women and women enjoy higher life expectancy than men. Infant and maternal mortality is low.

All these together have been described as the 'Kerala Model' and the Malayala Manorama has not just reported on the emergence of this phenomenon, it has also directly contributed to the extraordinary success of the state in the field of human development by spreading literacy, inculcating a passion for reading and launching various social movements under its auspices.

In fact, the social commitment and vision of Malayala Manorama is evident from the fact that its first editorial was on the demand for education of 'Pulayas', a community of untouchables, who were not allowed to walk on public roads in those days. Manorama has always stood for the people and with the people in the battle against injustice and for freedom and equality.

It is praiseworthy that in 45 days Manorama readers contributed Rs. 2.39 crores for rebuilding of Banegaon village in Latur after the earthquake. I believe this is the largest collection

for relief work initiated by a newspaper in India. This shows that Manorama's care for the society is not limited to Kerala alone but extends to whole of India.

The Malayalam language owes a great deal to the crusading zeal of Malayala Manorama. Along with other newspapers, the Manorama led the way in developing a common script for printing and dissemination of the language. The Newspaper and its distinguished sister publication, *Bhashaposhini* have been a nursery for great thinkers and poets of Kerala. I am also delighted to know that it was the Malayala Manorama, which first published the poems of my illustrious predecessor Dr. K.R. Narayanan during his student days.

The Manorama played a stellar role in our freedom movement, for which it suffered at the hands of then rulers. The newspaper was shut down for nine years but its management and staff refused to bow down or compromise on their ideals. Through its silent sacrifice, the newspaper became a symbol of our nations' struggle for freedom and basic liberties.

In our country, freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution and the influence, credibility and quality of our media is well recognized. However, freedom of expression can not be guaranteed only by legal rights and enactment. A conducive atmosphere must be created for the purpose and this can be done if we remember Gurudev Ravindranath Tagore's words "*where knowledge is free*" and "*where words come out from the depths of truth*".

The media has an important role to play in cleansing public life. However, to undertake this role the conduct of the media itself should be above board. It must be always kept in mind that ends and means are both important. The highest standards of ethics must be maintained at all times. Sensationalism should never become a substitute for objective assessment and truthful reporting. Gossip and speculation should not replace hard facts. Every effort should be made to ensure that political or commercial interests are not passed off as legitimate and independent opinion.

Integrity and independence are two sides of the same coin and both must be equally important for our media and for every one of us. There should be recognition that the media is accountable to its readers and viewers at large and through them to the entire nation.

Newspapers like Malayala Manorama, which had the benefit of leadership from several generations of luminaries like Kandathil Varghese Mapillai, K.C. Mammen Mapillai, K.M. Cherian and K.M. Mathew play a major role in shaping the values in journalism and of our society. In his Sacred Trust, Shri Mammen Mapillai told his sons and the entire Malayala Manorama family:-

"Manorama is a sacred public trust or an institution God has bestowed upon us to be used without fear or favour from anyone. You should always work with this in mind. God has placed in our hands a mighty weapon. To use it for our personal, vindictive and vitriolic ends will be an

unpardonable and immoral act injurious to the faith bestowed on us by a large number of people. God does not want that. And hence our eternal vow should be to tirelessly work for the success of fairness, justice and morality."

If these words were true then, it is true now and will remain true in future. There can be no better mission for a news organization than what Shri Mapillai said more than half a century ago. Today Malayala Manorama stands as an outstanding example of quality and principled journalism. I am confident that the present leadership and the whole family of Malayala Manorama will continue to discharge this sacred Trust in letter and spirit.

While both the Manorama and the people of Kerala have much to be proud about, there is little room for complacency. Society in Kerala continues to face a number of challenges. There is need for industrialization and rapid creation of jobs. Kerala's infrastructure requires to be significantly improved. The remittance revenue from non-resident Keralites has to be channelized into long term development activities. The public need to be educated on how to avoid life style diseases like diabetes, mental illness, depression etc. Adequate provision needs to be made for the care of the elderly, whose numbers are rapidly growing. Issues of urbanization such as waste management and disposal need to be addressed with a sense of urgency. Atrocities against women needs to be tackled with a stern hand.

There is need to find innovative solutions and new methods of mobilizing society for collective welfare as Kerala prepares to address these new challenges. I am confident the Manorama Group will play its due role in this regard.

I once again congratulate Malayala Manorama for its 125 years of public service, and wish the organization every success in the future. May you continue to serve the people of India with strength, vigour and dedication. May your columns give voice to the voiceless and unorganized sectors. May you stand tall as a pillar that supports our democratic political system and be a guiding light for the society and leadership.

Thank you. Jai Hind.