

**Welcome by N. Ram at the inauguration of The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, January 31, 2013**

*Rashtrapati-ji, leaders of political India, members of the diplomatic corps, friends from various walks of life, colleagues*

The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy is a new-born venture associated with a 134-year-old newspaper and it is an honour for us that the Honourable President of India has consented to inaugurate it. It would be strange if I were to extend a welcome to Shri Pranab Mukherjee at his official residence but let me say a warm thank you, Rashtrapati-ji, for having us here and consenting to do the inauguration in this magnificent setting.

*The Hindu*, founded on September 20, 1878, is the oldest surviving major daily newspaper of Indian nationalism, by which we mean the great socio-political movement that won freedom for India from colonial bondage and helped consolidate the gains of independence in every sphere of national life.

We think that setting up a serious intellectual niche or division within Kasturi & Sons Limited, the company that publishes our newspapers, is an idea whose time has come. There is a great deal of superficiality and dilettantism not just in mainstream Indian journalism, but also in public discourse, on key issues that matter. Alongside this, we note a widespread disenchantment with policies and institutions, which have clearly performed below par and let the people of India down. Recently published opinion polls testify to this mood of popular disenchantment.

There are many things going for democratic India, above all the abiding strengths of our ancient, living historical civilization, our sound constitutional balances and safeguards, and the good sense, wisdom, and resilience of our people. But recent events remind us that we face tough challenges such as massive corruption and misgovernance, assaults on democratic values from within and without, and violations of women's rights, dignity, and lives. As costly are the grievous failures to address the inequalities and the mass and multiple deprivations that plague the lives of hundreds of millions of our people.

The mission of the Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy will be to provide intellectual ballast and substance to our, and the reading public's, understanding of selected political subjects, challenges, and issues. It has become a fashion in some quarters to decry politics, to depict it as nothing but a cynical game, to treat it, at best, as some kind of necessary evil. We firmly disagree with such perceptions and attitudes. We take democratic politics seriously, regard it as having much potential for good notwithstanding its seamy side. We regard public policies, their orientation, content, and impact, as vital to how a society fares.

The core values *The Hindu* has been committed to over the long term will be the bedrock of the Centre's orientation and activities. Truth-telling, freedom and independence, fairness and justice, secularism, respect for diversity and pluralism, humaneness, and contributing to the social good – we take these guiding principles seriously. They are not 'motherhood and apple pie' sentiments (as Americans would say).

We do not see the Hindu Centre as being in competition with our universities and other academic research centres. The political studies we will fund, support, and help to bring to public light will be focussed, close to the ground, and of demonstrable public and policy interest. We envisage this research, as well as its publication and dissemination, to be fast-tracked, at least in comparison with what universities and other academic institutions are used to. The way the Justice J.S. Verma committee went about its work, and came up with what could be a game-changing contribution, within the 30-day deadline it set for itself is an inspiration and a model for all of us.

While the studies will be selective and focussed, we expect the discourse organised or enabled by the Centre to range far and wide in the spirit of intellectual curiosity.

You will hear more about the Centre's mission and proposed activities from other speakers. But I hope I have given you an idea of why we are assembled here.

I warmly welcome everyone who has responded to our invitation and once again express our gratitude to the President of our Republic, himself a reservoir of knowledge on politics and public policy.