This International forum aimed to discuss about ‘The Role and Responsibility of Media in the 21st Century’, is a very interesting and an intriguing theme. The theme deserves attention and its worthy of discussion given the changing order of our times. The development of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) at a pace that we could never imagine and its integration with the mass media paved way for the quick and efficient transformation of media. It changed the very dynamics of media. The very traditional model of the TOP DOWN Model of information dissemination has given way to the BOTTOM UP Model the world over, leading to increasing democratic face of media which is redefining its posture and content.

Today, there has been a shift in the way the audience consume media messages. The erstwhile passive audiences of media or the so-called receivers of the media messages have shifted their roles to become active content generators. Thanks to the advent of the peoples media or the alternative media that is the Social Media. The Social Media has popularised the concept of Citizen Journalism. Today, we get news not only from the established media houses but also from the common man. The transformation has changed the patterns of the way the information is produced, consumed and distributed. In times of crisis, The Social Media or the Citizens Media seem to be more active and efficient in the distribution of information than the mainstream media. The recent examples of natural calamities like the Japan tsunami, the Haiti earthquake and Hurricane Sandy is a classic case in point.

‘Speed’ remains the buzz word in the media today. Political turmoil in the Middle East, the European economic crisis has all reached us in a fraction of a second and also in real-time. The concept of 24-hour deadline is gradually fading giving rise to speedy journalism. Although, the popularity of 24/7 breaking news concept of Television has posed a lot of challenges to the print medium during its initial days in several countries in Asia, the traditional medium like the print media in Asian nations unlike in the US and other European countries has demonstrated that it can withstand the pressure of the fast-paced nature of the new media.
Just like a coin having two sides to it, these positive aspects of the media also have a negative side to it. Now I would like to discuss some of issues that deserve pressing consideration for the ‘Fourth Estate’ to stand up to its repute.

Journalism today is more of a collection of issues interested to public rather than in public interest. It is not just a collection of reportage on important significant world happenings. News is what is created around an editorial table consisting of personnel, who themselves are mere puppets of mighty media corporates and conglomerates. News is not the stuff that moved nations and once played an important part in our nation’s freedom struggle. News has now transformed into a business model that is carefully crafted and propagated by a small class of specialised people or the elites who decide what information should reach the rest of the nation.

The media is supposed to be the watch dog of the nation, the so called “Fourth Estate”. It has the power and the freedom to question and bring the high and the mighty to task. But it is the voice of the people, and in a democracy the vox-populi should ideally be seated on the pedestal. The media should reflect the popular opinion, not manipulate or create opinion in the masses and propagate their vested interests as popular opinion.

Media today is ridden with the flair of sensationalism, propaganda of and by the corporate and a desensitisation from the common mass. Having transformed into a monstrous corporate agenda model, the media sells news not for awareness but to increase its numbers in terms of its revenue. The daily newspaper is filled with dystopic news of rape and murder and the general degradation of society.

The media is at its best when it has got hold of anything tragic, disturbing or alarming. The media has blind-folded itself and oblivious to the negative aspects of news. Any disaster or shocking news is guaranteed to catch the eye balls faster than positive news. The real sense of news is deteriorating in the 21st century.
The media corporations have dipped themselves in the Holy Bible of yellow journalism to create this working business model for themselves. The story tellers in media in the race for the so-called selling stories are forgetting to cover positive stories: stories of courage, stories of hope and stories of change. It is the management and the owners of the many media houses which force the journalists to take up stories for higher readership and ratings. The common notion that the stories that shock are the stories which sell could be a reason for this.

There are many newsrooms today which have journalists bringing bizarre stories and one may not be surprised to find the executives framing stories for instance the rape stories in a way to victimise the rape survivor even more, make her look even more vulnerable just to grab attention. There are magazines which sell stories in the name of ‘scoops’. In most of the cases, the information would have been leaked by some authorities and the story is sold out to readers as investigative piece.

The media in the 21st century is all about running a race. Essentially, this race was supposed to be about reporting the truth; about creating awareness, about reporting news that was imperative to the knowledge of the masses, about sculpting the thought processes of millions across the nation, about being the medium for change.

But this trend is long gone; disappeared with the tides of time. Today the race is about who gets the story first; and spicier the meat, the better. It is no longer about getting awareness and analysis of the new welfare bill about to be passed in the parliament. It is about getting the first interview and also going to the extent of getting the picture of a victim of a gang rape and plastering it on television screens for the world to see. It is no longer about reporting about the plight of victims of cross fire, but more about two neighbouring nations just can’t stay out of each other’s hair. What happened to sensitivity? Where did the journalist’s humanity go when he sat on the shoulders of a flood victim, while reporting about the damages of the flood in Kedarnath that recently wreaked havoc in the lives of thousands?

And what about the reasons for celebration that the journalists conveniently forget to write about? The story that inspires people, stories that celebrate the achievements of common man, the story of those people who save lives through adoption and the stories of those heroes whose names go unheard of? Why don’t
happy, joyous heart-warming stories make headlines? It’s that race, the race that pits sensitivity against sensationalism. And sensationalism wins- of course it does- it sells.

Journalism is no longer about creating awareness, it’s about instigating rage. It is no longer about letting the world celebrate its heroes. It is about feeding on the plight of victims. It is no longer about reporting the ‘truth’- because the truth cannot be all bad. After all, when in training, journalists are taught to be serious and serious journalism is often misconstrued as squeezing the bad out of every aspect of life and hanging it out for the world to see. Sad, but in most cases it’s true.

I would like to draw conclusions based on the points that I have highlighted during the discourse. Though mass media offers tremendous potential to promote development and democracy than any other media, it’s high time media becomes the medium of honourable news reporting living up to its other name as the ‘Fourth Estate” rather than a medium of stripping everyone and everything of its honour.