

250th anniversary of the first freedom of press and information law

Models of press freedom

SHAKHAWAT LITON

1760s ushered in a new dawn of freedom of the press.

Anders Chydenius, an enlightened thinker and politician of the Kingdom of Sweden, had struggled against secret and unaccountable government power, as he urged for the freedom of press and information and right of access to public records law.

As a member of the Swedish Parliament from 1765, his idea about freedom of press was unambiguous: "A divided freedom is no freedom and a divided constraint is an absolute constraint." In his memoirs, he even claimed that "for nothing else did I work in the Diet [parliament] as diligently as the freedom of writing and printing".

After his struggle for a decade, he succeeded in winning this battle, as the King of Sweden agreed to have a law guaranteeing freedom of the press. The Swedish Parliament enacted the Freedom of Press Act on December 2, 1766, which is also known as the world's first freedom of information law. The law abolished censorship of books and newspapers, and required authorities to provide public access to all official records.

Professor Juha Manninen of the University of Helsinki in Finland says that the key achievements of the 1766 legislation were the abolishment of political censorship and the gaining of public access to government documents.

This year's World Press Freedom Day coincides with the 250th anniversary of the first freedom of press and information law covering both modern-day Sweden and Finland (at the time of the enactment of the law, Finland was still part of the Kingdom of Sweden).

Much before the Swedish legislation, the UK Parliament abolished political censorship in 1695. But it had not been replaced by a new law formulated with positive concepts, wherefore control could seek new forms. Therefore, the law enacted by the Swedish Parliament became the first to abolish political censorship and safeguard freedom of the press.

The legislation was aimed at thwarting government's attempts to conceal, fake, distort, or falsify information that its citizens receive by suppressing or crowding out



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political news that the public might receive through news outlets.

The Swedish example started changing the

world. The 20th century witnessed a wave of enactments of freedom of information laws, as more than 90 countries have adopted such

provisions since 1766.

The United States brought the historic First Amendment to its Constitution in 1789, making provisions that the Congress will never make laws curtailing freedom of press, speech and expression. The Freedom of Information Act was introduced in 1966 in the US, and today almost all European countries have such a law. In the EU, major steps towards open governments were taken in the 1990s. A big step forward was the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in 2000. The Charter includes both freedom of expression and the right of access to documents. In 2001, the first regulation on access to documents was adopted. Bangladesh also enacted the Right to Information law in 2008.

Undoubtedly, freedom of information is extremely important for the proper functioning of any economy. Access to government information is now seen as a human right. The principle of freedom of information means that the general public and mass media have access to official records.

However, a major challenge to open access to information is "overreach in governmental society. States should be able to keep some information confidential in line with legitimate purposes and processes set out in international human rights law," as per a concept note of UNESCO observing World Press Freedom Day. It also states that information from administrative and executive authorities - concerning, for example, laws and public expenditure - should generally be accessible to everyone. "Hence, freedom of information both helps provide oversight over governmental bodies, as well as the possibility to hold them accountable, and this right strengthens the relevance of press freedom and independent journalism."

Finland, the birth place of Anders Chydenius, the father of freedom of information, is now a free and open society. Its government is legally obliged to disclose information on par with the openness strategy existing in the country. In fact, like previous years, Finland has ranked first in the latest World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders (RWB).

The country's openness in press freedom was responsible in establishing an excellent image of Finland, as it scored the second highest in the list of least corrupt countries

on Transparency International's Corruption Index. Finland's government has made transparency and availability of information - essentially, the factors that lead to good journalism - an institutional prerogative.

Finns are also major consumers of journalism - according to the European Center for Journalism, 483 out of 1,000 citizens of the country regularly buy newspapers. And 76 percent of the population over 10-years-old read the paper. The government is, in other words, both taking care to safeguard the role of journalism and expand it with new technologies.

A Grand Celebration
The Swedish and Finnish governments, among others, are making plans to celebrate the passage of 250 years of the world's first freedom of information law. The main event will be the World Press Freedom Day Conference in Finland. Finland is also hosting the World Press Freedom Day for journalists and media professionals, co-organised with UNESCO, in Helsinki from May 3-4, 2016. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland says that over 800 participants from about a hundred countries are expected to attend this event. "The main event at Finlandia Hall will be opened by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä," says the foreign ministry in a post on its website. A 'press freedom prize' will be awarded at the main event, while the Minister for Foreign Affairs Timo Soini will host the reception for invited guests. As expected, Anders Chydenius will be remembered for his role in achieving the first Freedom of Press Act in the world.

The ministry says Finnish commitment to freedom of expression and press freedom are long standing, adding, "The materialisation of democracy development and human rights depend on access to information and the materialisation of freedom of expression." In Finland, the whole year of 2016 has been dedicated to the 250th anniversary of the world's first Freedom of Information Act, the theme of the year being "Right to Know, Right to Say". It's only fitting that the father of freedom of information is remembered for his tireless endeavours in ensuring that the press attains this right, thereby making it accessible to the ordinary people.

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Changing our lifestyle

ZARINA NAHAR KABIR

WHY do we need to change our lifestyle? What good will that do? What's wrong with smoking, an unhealthy diet, constantly tapping on the smartphone or working too much? Health is a pretty good reason to reconsider these habits, not only from an individual perspective but in consideration of population health.

Take smoking for example. The World Health Organisation very simply rationalises why one should quit smoking: "Tobacco kills half its users". So if you and I are active smokers, either one of us will die from it. Not only does smoking affect one's own health by contributing to a number of risk factors for respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, it also affects health of those in proximity of the smoker. Passive smoking, exposure to tobacco smoke as a result of people smoking around a person (also known as environmental tobacco smoke), adversely affects children's health even at a foetal stage, often leading to pre-term birth. Children exposed to passive smoking have greater risk of respiratory infections, wheezing, asthma, snoring (a form of sleep-disordered breathing) and so on. It's not even the exhaled smoke by the active smoker that contains the main danger, but the state of the smouldering cigarette that releases unfiltered toxic side-stream gases and particles that harbours the major harm. Research tells us that the cardiovascular damage in terms of free radical-induced injury to the vascular system or

thicker and stiffer arteries are startlingly similar between active and passive smokers.

What compels us to these addictions? How do we empower individuals to make the choice of changing unhealthy lifestyles? In Swedish primary health care settings, public health nurses use various techniques to influence health behaviour. One such method is motivational interviewing, which is mainly a set of

rather than only reflect on it. It is not that we don't understand the need for changing our unhealthy lifestyle. But it is ambivalence that holds us back, the wanting (or knowing the rationale) to change, yet not changing. MI is a tool to free oneself from such ambivalence.

Even if one decides to make lifestyle changes, it is not easy to make it happen. Bringing about a behavioural change requires a person to go through a number

of stages of change (Prochaska et al, *Health Psychology*, 1994). Many of us may be trapped at the *pre-contemplation* stage when we either do not think about changing or wanting a change, thus choosing to live with the harmful lifestyle. MI becomes useful as a tool at this stage in initiating the discussion about a potential change. It continues to play a critical role when a person makes the transition from the *pre-*

contemplation to the *contemplation* stage, now actively wanting to bring about a behavioural change, whether it is through exercising, eating healthy or quitting smoking. This is the crucial stage for the person to seek support. The following stages are *preparation* by strategising a way to modify health behaviour, including setting up a timeframe and going into action when the planning of the preparation phase is put into practice. Sustaining the change after a few months of the action phase entails *maintenance* of the health behaviour. The challenge at this stage is not to relapse into the previous unhealthy pattern.

All this is much easier said than done. Even if we believe in setting straight some of our unhealthy lifestyle, the thought of it can itself be a source of stress. Moreover, none of this can be achieved alone. In Bangladesh, where support from formal healthcare system for health promotion and disease prevention through behavioural change is practically non-existent, the informal network of friends, family members and colleagues can extend our support to help individuals turn over a new leaf for a healthy lifestyle. We can help ease the path for our close ones in making such a drastic move, be it quitting smoking, forcing impatient fingers to stay off the smartphone, being physically active or balancing between professional work and family life. Enriching public health is in our own hands.


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Motivational interviewing (MI) is about focused conversations with a person, venturing to help her into making a lifestyle change. It is a tool of empowerment that helps a person through structured conversations, helping her to actively talk herself into making a change, rather than only reflect on it.

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QUOTABLE Quote



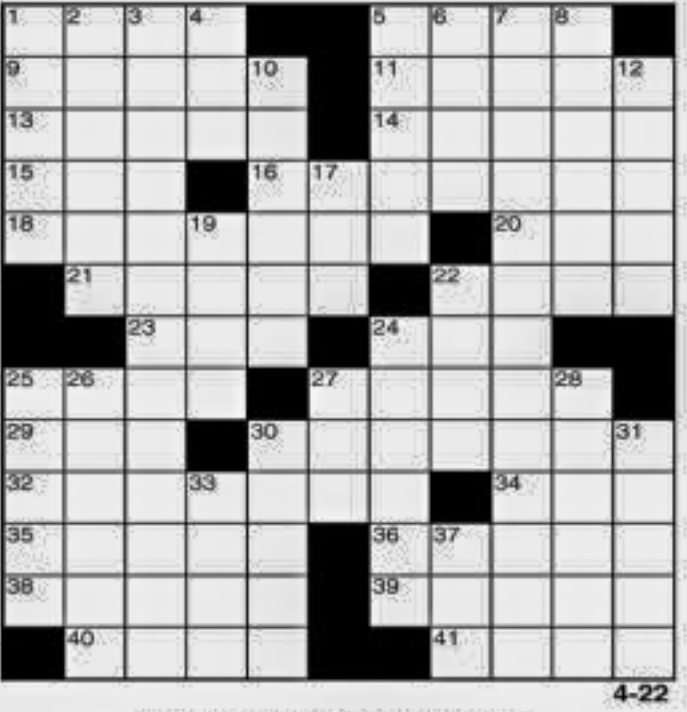
FRANZ KAFKA
Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
USAID Agro-Inputs Project (AIP) in Bangladesh, implemented by CNFA, invites request for proposal from reputed communications agency/firm to "Organize Mobile Roadshow" in order to ensure a wide viewership of the PSAs, and to encourage discussion on quality inputs at the upazila level.

Experienced and interested agencies/firms can find details regarding the task from <http://www.aipbd.org/opportunities/rfps/>
The deadline for hard copy proposal submission is 17:00, May 16, 2016. Bidders must not make inquires to USAID.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Hunt for
 - 5 Horn sound
 - 9 Hiker's path
 - 11 Anticipate
 - 13 Blood line
 - 14 Suit fabric
 - 15 Particle
 - 16 Ref's need
 - 18 Plots
 - 20 Dress line
 - 21 Crooked
 - 22 Swift jets
 - 23 Wallet bill
 - 24 Brief time
 - 25 Cote cries
 - 27 Solemn
 - 29 Museum stuff
 - 30 Elevate
 - 32 Preparing, as a hook
 - 34 Gun owner's org.
 - 35 Concerning
 - 36 Spiked clubs
 - 38 Washer cycle
 - 39 "Give it --!"
- DOWN**
- 1 Rough guesses
 - 2 Beethoven symphony
 - 3 Receivers for satellite signals
 - 4 Young fox
 - 5 Grounds
 - 6 Some sheep
 - 7 Geology and meteorology
 - 8 Friend of Pooh
 - 10 They carry shields
 - 12 Abounds
 - 17 Chop down
 - 19 -- out (barely makes)
 - 22 Vast expanses
 - 24 Mark of disgrace
 - 25 Elephant of story
 - 26 Mideast peninsula
 - 27 -- Fernando
 - 28 Coercion
 - 30 Church doings
 - 31 Art class staple
 - 33 Walrus feature
 - 37 "You -- Here"



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

A	F	A	R	S	O	R	E	R			
M	O	L	E	S	E	V	A	D	E		
P	R	O	M	O	L	A	T	I	N		
E	G	O	D	E	F	L	A	T	E		
D	E	F	E	A	T	T	O	W			
L	E	N	O		O	P	E	C	A	R	S
M	I	D		P	O	K	E				
A	M	I		D	E	F	A	C	E		
D	E	F	I	N	E	D	L	O	X		
R	A	I	S	E		O	L	I	V	E	
A	D	E	L	E		N	E	V	E	R	
S	E	D	E	R		T	E	S	T		

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