

Of press freedom, adapting to change, and a conference

Today (24th of July), as I write this, I realise that it is the anniversary of the lifting of censorship in Turkey, commemorated since 1908 as Press Freedom Day in that country. This year, Press Freedom Day is being commemorated as Struggle for Press Freedom Day in prisons, courtrooms and exile. Incidentally, today is also the day journalists and executives from Turkey's leading newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*, will be facing a judge for the first time – charged with aiding and abetting a terrorist organisation. Can Dündar, *Cumhuriyet's* exiled former editor-in-chief who was awarded the 2017 Golden Pen of Freedom, the annual award of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), describes the night 13 journalists were arrested and placed in solitary cells after police raided their homes:

The police came in the early hours. Everyone was asleep... It was twilight... Thirteen journalists' homes were raided in the early hours of 31 October. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper lived in one. The CEO in another. Columnists in four, lawyers in three... the reporter, the ombudsman, the books section editor, the cartoonist, the accountant... All were senior figures in the *Cumhuriyet*, Turkey's oldest and most prestigious newspaper. Trying to reassure their terrified, bleary-eyed children, they were forced to watch as their homes and archives were turned inside out and computers were impounded. They were taken to the main police station first, then to the hospital for a medical, and finally to the biggest prison in the country. Placed in solitary cells, with no idea what their crime was. As it turned out, they had to wait for 151 days before they could learn. The indictments were announced on the 151st day: aiding and abetting armed terrorist organisations. Can Dündar, as the former editor-in-chief, was the number one defendant. And he was charged with altering the newspaper's editorial policy. "My first reaction was to exclaim 'So what?' Since when did prosecutors determine editorial policy for newspapers, anyway? The answer is obvious: Since the President's seizure of the media in his drive for absolute power..."

This is just a window to an authoritarian world. We in India remember how news publishing houses faced the wrath of the administration during the Emergency days in the 1970s. And we know that a country's standing on the world stage is determined

by the amount of liberty it gives its press and how it treats journalists.

The Atlantic, a magazine founded in 1857 by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Harriet Beecher Stowe, is still going strong. As Margaret Sullivan, columnist for the *Washington Post*, says, the magazine's objective in the pre-Civil War era was to get behind the abolition of slavery and to explore "the American idea". A magazine as steeped in history as *The Atlantic* is adapting quickly to the changing times. Says Sullivan, "A decade ago, like most traditional publications, the monthly magazine got 85 per cent of its revenue from print advertising and circulation. It was losing money, and with print ads plummeting, it could have gone the way of the dodo or of, say, the *Baltimore City Paper*, which folded this month." However, today, *The Atlantic* has more than 80 per cent of its revenue coming from digital sources, live events and even a consulting business. It is growing – adding staff, and vastly increasing its digital audience – and it is making profits as well.

Then, of course, as Sullivan succinctly puts it, "There's the journalism. *The Atlantic* has kicked over the idea that today's online audiences only want short and punchy hot takes — mostly with the word 'Trump' in the headline." The magazine's digital growth has been remarkable – 33 million monthly unique visitors, up from 2 million in early 2009.

The WAN-IFRA Conference and Expo is back in Chennai after six years. Incidentally, this is also the silver jubilee year of the conference. This year, the event will be held on September 12, 13 and 14. The venue: the ITC Grand Chola on Mount Road in Guindy. There will be two parallel sessions – the World Editors Forum South Asia Summit for publishers and editors, and the World Printers Forum Conference for newspaper production managers. Learning workshops on Investigative Journalism and Business Models for print Production are scheduled on the first day.

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