



Commonwealth Journalists Association

NEWSLETTER

September 2023

## **William Horsley writes: One year before CHOGM, a CJA wake-up call to states on press freedom**

“To protect the truth, we must protect the truth-tellers”. That is the title of my article published in *The Parliamentarian*, the journal of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The whole current edition is devoted to scrutinising the record of the 56 member states in relation to the brave commitments they signed up to in the Charter of 2013.

So what about the pledges made in the Charter’s Article V, on Freedom of Expression? The article cites Kingsley Abbott, Director of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies and a leading international human rights expert. Abbott said “legal and physical attacks are eroding media freedom around the world”; and Commonwealth countries -- like others -- “need to end these attacks and amend or repeal laws being misused to target journalists”.

But how? The Commonwealth’s refusal so far to adopt its own mechanisms to achieve member governments’ compliance with their public pledges has diminished its credibility. Representative civil society groups now call for a “meaningful plan of action”, made in consultation with non-government stakeholders and experts, to implement the provisions of the Commonwealth Media Principles that Commonwealth law ministers adopted last November - and which are to go before heads of government in Samoa in October 2024. Among the commitments are to “ensure that state organs and agents respect international human rights obligations”, and to “act decisively to end impunity” through effective investigations into all alleged cases of killings and attacks. If the Commonwealth were genuinely to act to honour those promises, the improvements could be dramatic.

The article suggests the way forward lies in what Commonwealth ministers themselves call the “spirit of partnership” with the CJA and the five other ci “valuable contribution”, the ministers acknowledged, that brought these matters onto the agenda of the 56 governments. The heart of the message, one year before the Summit, is this: the Commonwealth has “a ready-made pool of

civil society experts and stakeholders”, who together with other guardians of international law can really help the Commonwealth to recover its reputation with respect to media freedom and the safety of journalists. Make that partnership real.

See the article on page 224 of The Parliamentarian via this [link](#).

More on media freedom:

- From the Institute of Commonwealth Studies [monthly update on media freedom](#)
  - Join the [Commonwealth Foundation’s Online People’s Forum](#) for discussion on media freedom and other issues in the countdown to CHOGM 2024 ■
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## Uganda

### Alice Drito writes from Uganda:

A Ugandan Journalist, Tonny Abet, working at Daily Monitor, Nation Media Groups [was arrested and detained by police](#) on 22nd September and later charged with criminal trespass in connection with investigating a story of a faulted multi-billion hospital project in Lubowa near the capital Kampala. He was released on police bond.



Photo: Monitor Journalist (Source: Phoenix APP)

The International Specialized Hospital project site [has come under the scrutiny of Parliamentary Health Committee](#) and its [Finance Committee](#), due to lack of transparency and accountability following their visit at the facility in 2022 to assess progress on construction work.

According to media reports, parliament approved \$379 million dollars (about 1.4 trillion Uganda shillings that time) to construct the facility.

The arrest of Abet is one of the series of attacks unleashed against journalists by state and non-state actors this year. On 20th July, 2023, [journalists were brutally assaulted](#), leaving one of the female journalists left with sustained injuries at the party headquarters of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), one of the leading opposition political parties in Uganda while other journalists lost their equipment. The party officials disassociated themselves from the attacks.



A Female Journalist supported by colleagues from crime scene Photo by Michael Kakumirizi (Source: From Phoenix APP)

[Given the African roots of UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day](#), this is a good time to look at these growing attacks and see them as a wakeup call to Commonwealth countries and others who have not lived up to the commitments of providing a conducive media climate. And [the 30th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action on human rights](#), should give Commonwealth countries an opportunity to assess and renew their commitment to press freedom. ■

Related articles:

[Daily Monitor cartoon](#)



United  
Kingdom

### **CJA-UK branch report - Raymond Whitaker, UK chair**

Following a successful pilot in the first half of 2023, the UK branch executive decided at its latest meeting to expand the branch's mentorship scheme, pairing experienced journalists with those just setting out on a media career. The aim is to recruit 20 mentors and invite applications from student journalists and those who have just completed, or are about to complete, university journalism courses.

Successful applicants will have monthly advice sessions for six months with their mentors, in person or remotely, helping them through their first steps in the media landscape. Feedback from the first mentees in the pilot scheme, which grew out of the CJA-UK student conference in Birmingham last year, was highly positive, and two of the students involved with the conference are now working in national media. The hope is that the expanded scheme might serve as a template for other CJA branches in the future.

The other initiative by CJA-UK is to hold an annual lecture on topics relevant to the media. The first, on November 21, is to be given by John Naughton, a columnist with The Observer and an academic at Wolfson College, Cambridge. His highly relevant subject is the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the media landscape. ■

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## Africa

**[From Global Voices](#): African perspectives: the role of artificial intelligence in journalism - AI training is an absolute must.**

In an interview with Global Voices, African journalists shared their views on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism on this continent.

Over the past few decades, the developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have transformed the journalism profession. In addition to basic internet usage and a plethora of social networks, artificial intelligence is now making inroads into journalism.

[ChatGPT](#), [ZeroGPT](#), [DALL-E](#), [new/s/leak](#), [Midjourney](#), and [Audemic](#) are just some of the [tools that all journalists should be aware of](#).

However, Africa remains the [least connected region in the world](#).

### South Africa

**[From The Conversation Africa](#): Climate change journalism in South Africa misses the mark by ignoring people's daily experiences.**

South Africa's media houses rely too heavily on events like conferences, climate disasters and the release of scientific papers in their reporting on climate change. That's a problem: it creates the potential for day-to-day issues related to climate change, like ongoing mitigation and adaptation efforts, to go unreported.

That's one of the key findings of [a study](#) I recently conducted into how the country's media cover the climate crisis. ■

[Click here](#) to read the full article.

## Zimbabwe

[Democracy in Africa](#) writes: **How media repression facilitated election manipulation in Gabon and Zimbabwe.**

Zimbabwe and Gabon, two countries with a history of protracted political dominance by one ruling party, held elections this week. These elections come against a recent military coup in [Niger](#) in July 2023 and a string of other military coups and attempted coups in [Mali](#), [Burkina Faso](#), [Chad](#), and [Sierra Leone](#) between 2020 to 2023.

In both countries voters are denied the right to make up their minds about who to support based on free and impartial information due to widespread media censorship and disinformation. The concerns about the restrictions on freedom of expression follow a worrying [trend](#) across Africa and threaten to undermine support for democracy on the continent, as they play a critical role in [enabling](#) the manipulation of elections in Africa.

So how did media (un)freedom undermine the credibility of elections in Gabon and Zimbabwe? ■

[Click here](#) to read this article in full.

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## Maldives

[From The Diplomat](#) - **One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Freedom of Expression Still Under Attack in Maldives**

President Solih's election in 2018 raised hopes for improved press freedom in the country. But journalists still face harassment, intimidation, and attacks.

Despite the country's reputation as a paradise of idyllic atolls, the country has a dark history of crackdowns on freedom of expression, which have left journalists murdered, threatened, and effectively gagged.

Attacks against journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders in Maldives frequently stem from allegations of blasphemy and restrictions on religious freedom. ■



**[Global Voices reports](#) that In Togo, a journalist honoured for his fight against corruption must from now on live in exile.**

In Togo, a journalist's determination and resilience net him an international prize, but cost him exile.

[Reporters Without Borders](#) (RSF)'s [2023 index](#) places [Togo](#) in the 70th position out of 180 countries for freedom of the press. Compared to the [2022](#) index (100th out of 180), the country, under president [Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé](#) since 2005, has certainly achieved a good boost of 30 places but its situation remains troubling.

On June 29, it was therefore while he was in exile that the investigative journalist received the announcement that he had been awarded the [2023 International Press Freedom Award](#) of the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#). ■

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# Americas

## Canada

### Canada defends digital taxes but sees path for global deal

[Reuters, July 18](#) - Canada on Tuesday defended its decision to push ahead with its implementation of digital services taxes starting next year, citing national interest even as Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland expressed hope in reaching an international consensus.

More than 140 countries were planning to implement a 2021 deal that would overhaul decades-old rules on how governments tax multinational companies that were widely considered to be outdated as digital giants like Apple or Amazon.com can book their profits in low-tax countries. ■

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# Asia

## Bangladesh

### Bangladesh: IPI welcomes repeal and replacement of Digital Security Act.

[The International Press Institute said in August](#): The Bangladeshi government must ensure new draft Cyber Security Act aligns with national and international laws and standards.

The IPI global network welcomes the recent decision by the Bangladeshi government to repeal and replace the Digital Security Act, which has been repeatedly abused for years to harass and intimidate journalists. However, authorities must now consult with local civil society and human rights experts to ensure the proposed replacement, the Cyber Security Act, is fully compatible with domestic and international laws protecting freedom of expression, access to information, and press freedom.

IPI and other press freedom and human rights groups have repeatedly called on the government to end the abuse of the DSA against journalists. ■

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## India

### [The Reuters Institute of Politics reports: How to keep doing journalism under siege: five tips from editors in India and Hungary](#)

**Ritu Kapur and Peter Erdelyi explain how their outlets have managed to stay afloat amid the erosion of press freedom and democratic decline.**

As so many countries face democratic backsliding, journalists face more obstacles to keep reporting on issues that are important for their audiences. At our [Reuters Memorial Lecture](#) this year, panellists from Nicaragua and Venezuela stressed that the decline in press freedom in their own countries should be a warning for the rest of the world.

“People believe democracy is forever, and we’re showing you that’s not the case,” Venezuelan editor [Luz Mely Reyes](#) said.

The efforts of journalists in authoritarian countries are often heroic, as they face [lengthy prison sentences](#) and violence. But how do news organisations stay afloat in countries like India and Hungary, that still keep a democratic facade but are increasingly arbitrary and repressive, and restrict the space for public contestation, political participation and press freedom?

I spoke to [Peter Erdelyi](#) and [Ritu Kapur](#) to find out what journalists in similar situations can do to keep their reporting going amid democratic backsliding. Erdelyi is a former Journalist Fellow of the Institute and until recently held the position of director at the Hungarian online newspaper [444.hu](#) and fact-checking website [Lakmusz](#). Kapur is a member of our Advisory Board and the founder and CEO of the Indian mobile-first digital news platform [The Quint](#). ■

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## Pakistan

[Dawn newspaper reports](#) that Pakistan has been ranked third in the world over the imposition of internet restrictions in the first half of 2023.

According to a report by Surfshark, a virtual private network company headquartered in Lithuania, a half-year analysis of internet shutdown based on the Internet Shutdown Tracker reveals that Pakistan was responsible for three of the 42 new restrictions worldwide, which were [imposed](#) following the [arrest](#) of former prime minister Imran Khan on May 9.

At the time, access to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube was restricted in the country, while several temporary cellular network disruptions were also witnessed across the country for several days afterward. ■

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# Australia

**[The Guardian Australia writes:](#) Journalists taking dead people's photos from social media without permission inflames the wound of powerlessness.**

We applaud fearless journalism when the target of tenacity is a lying politician, a corrupt businessman or a war criminal. But when these investigative skills turn to trauma, the justification for the tenacity is weaker because the public interest test is more tenuous. Ethical decisions lie between these blurred lines.

Trauma experiences are wounds of powerlessness. No matter what the event – fire, tsunami, violence, war or bus crash – those involved have lost their power of choice, lost their ability to move, to breathe and to determine their destiny.

Two things are vital for trauma recovery. The first is the restoration of autonomy. The second is the ability to own and shape our story, to make meaning of the event.

[Click here](#) to read the full story.

## Rupert Murdoch steps down

**[The Conversation writes:](#) From the earliest years of his career, the young Rupert Murdoch ruthlessly pursued his interests.**

Nearly every biographical commentary on Rupert Murdoch notes how he began with a modest inheritance in Adelaide, principally an afternoon newspaper, and built it into a global multimedia empire. Walter Marsh's book [Young Rupert: The Making of the Murdoch Empire](#) has the distinctive strength of knowing Adelaide much better than any other Murdoch watcher, and studying Murdoch's Adelaide period in more depth than anyone else.

Rupert's father, Sir Keith Murdoch, was the most famous Australian newspaperman of his generation. As the dominant figure in the Herald & Weekly Times group for over two decades, he built the country's first newspaper empire. ■

Related articles:

[Rupert Murdoch's media empire through the years](#)

[Rupert Murdoch's exit ends chapter for polarising figure in his native Australia](#)

[Former Australian PM Malcolm Turnbull says Rupert Murdoch's 'anger-tainment' damaged the democratic world](#)

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# Pacific

**[From The UK Guardian Pacific Project:](#) Solomon Islands newspaper pledged to promote 'truth about China's generosity' in return for funding.**

The Solomon Star denies accusations of 'giving away' its independence by accepting thousands of dollars' worth of equipment. ■

# UK

**[The Press Gazette writes:](#) Survey reveals global newsroom adoption of AI at early stage but set to increase.**

Three-quarters of respondent newsrooms see the new opportunities from ChatGPT and Bard.

Four in ten news organisations have not greatly changed their approach to [AI](#) in the newsroom since 2019, according to a new LSE survey.

The lack of development on AI in many newsrooms comes despite the arrival of accessible generative AI tools – such as [ChatGPT](#)'s launch last November.

However, 80% expect an increase in the use of AI in their newsrooms, and 73% believe generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Google's Bard present new opportunities for journalism.

Some 85% have experimented with generative AI technology in varying degrees so far.

[Click here](#) for the full report. ■

**Clive Myrie: 'I don't agree with Gary Lineker about the BBC' - [An Independent online interview](#)**

As he releases his memoir, Clive Myrie talks to Yasmin Alibhai-Brown about how his family got caught in the Windrush scandal, BBC impartiality and the newsroom without Huw Edwards.

The newsman is renowned for the excellence of his reports from conflict zones around the world. Before Myrie and the late [George Alagiah](#), most foreign affairs correspondents were white. Now he is a trusted news presenter and documentary maker, host of the flagship quiz programme [Mastermind](#), and he has also hosted the edgy topical panel show [Have I Got News For You](#). He is sharp, intellectually curious, dapper too – often wearing gorgeous scarves loosely around his neck.

It's hard to imagine then that at the age of four, he was "completely mute". Concerned pre-school teachers thought the withdrawn boy needed to see a psychologist. His ferociously protective Jamaican mum, Lynne, a trained teacher herself, told them sternly to let him be. Thousands of black children from the 60s to the 90s were pathologised by educators, [sent off to "special" schools](#) – in reality, sink schools – and wasted. When I interview him, I feel the injustice of that still burning in him.

In the candid memoir, he not only delves into his own upbringing and career, but shares his personal views and passions. How, I ask him, did cautious BBC bosses let him get away with it? And with other "transgressions"? Like a [recent Guardian column](#) eloquently defending migrants coming to our shores? The column would, he admits, have been "discombobulating for many. The BBC is [expected to be impartial and unbiased](#). Those words are incorrect. We have to be on the right side of history and be empathetic. Britons went off to seek better lives after the war. Today's migrants are no different."

[Click here](#) for the full interview. ■

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## NEW CJA NEWSLETTER FEATURE: “I was there”



**Veteran journalists share important reporting moments.**

**CJA President Emeritus Mahendra Ved provides this edition’s ‘I was there’ column.**

This was a rare occasion when I grew sentimental and had a lump in my throat at work. How often does one witness the country’s Prime Minister asking a question and on hearing the reply, pursing her lips in visible pride?

It was April 7, 1984, the fifth day of the Soyuz T-11 Mission, launched on April 2. On board, along with two Soviet astronauts, was Indian Air Force’s Squadron Leader Rakesh Sharma.

We were at the control room at the Air Headquarters located on New Delhi’s Rafi Marg. ‘We’ included Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Indian Air Force Chief, Air Chief Marshal Dilbagh Singh, some of the brass and staff manning the control room and the crew of Doordarshan, the television network. Besides me, perhaps, there was no other pressman. The Hindustan Times where I was assigned the defence portfolio, was then the Capital’s largest daily.

Audio-visual messages were being relayed from a high-altitude facility the Telecom Department had set up deep inside northern Kashmir. Up above was a large monitor where one could see a black-and-white image of Sharma in his space suit. The voice was remote, coming from thousands of kilometres away, but fairly audible.

The Prime Minister asked: “*Wahan se Bharat kaisa dikhta hai?*” (How does India appear from there?). Sharma paused momentarily. His voice was now clear: He could say, without hesitation, “*Saare jahan se achha!*” (Better than the whole world).



There was a hushed silence. Nobody clapped, perhaps overawed in the PM's presence and because we were at a military facility.

The prime minister's face lit up. From a distance at the back, I could see her left profile. A lump rose in my throat. I am sure I couldn't be the only one feeling overwhelmed.

[Mahendra Ved](#) was President of the CJA from 2016 to 2021. He is currently a columnist for [Lokmarg.com](#). ■

**Catch up with the 'I was there' column in the [last edition of the CJA newsletter](#) and more.**

If you'd like to share your "I was there" moment with CJA members, please email [debbieransome@gmail.com](mailto:debbieransome@gmail.com).

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## Iconic India Club closes

By Rita Payne

Tributes and laments have been pouring in from the UK and abroad following confirmation that a much-loved Indian restaurant and hotel in central London is to close. The India Club has fended off previous attempts to shut it down to make way for a glossy new development. The battle has now been lost and many of its loyal supporters are devastated.

Ever since the news broke of the Club's closure after 60 years there have been daily queues outside with two-hour waits for a table. People are clearly anxious to eat in the restaurant before a beloved part of London's heritage disappears.

The India Club is on the first floor of the Hotel Strand Continental. It is a modest building and easy to miss with only a small sign outside. One enters through a door up a winding staircase to a bar on the first floor and restaurant on the second with meeting rooms and a handful of bedrooms.



The India Club, Strand, London

The India Club is on the first floor of the Hotel Strand Continental. It is a modest building and easy to miss with only a small sign outside. One enters through a door up a winding staircase to a bar on the first floor and restaurant on the second with meeting rooms and a handful of bedrooms.

Founded in 1951 on the Strand, the India Club was regarded by many Indians residing in the UK as a 'home away from home' It was a popular meeting place for leading writers, intellectuals and politicians associated with India's independence. It is of historical significance for both India and the UK, having been set up by Krishna Menon, India's first High Commissioner to the UK with Lady Mountbatten and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as founding members. They would meet beneath the stained-glass windows of the art-deco style bar to discuss their plans for India's future. Their photos still adorn the walls of the restaurant, bar and meeting rooms. Other well-known regulars included the Labour politician Michael Foot, and artist M F Husain who are no longer around to bemoan the closure of their favoured eating place. Renowned figures who are reputed to have dined there over the years include Dadabhai Naoroji, the first British Indian MP, and philosopher Bertrand Russell.



Inside The India Club

The British-Indian politician and businessman, Lord Karan Bilimoria, said: “I helped to save it 6 years ago and fought very hard, however now the landlords have finally got their way. I used to go to it as boy with my father 50 years ago when he was posted in the U.K. as a Colonel! Very sad to see a historic institution close. It is one of the first restaurants I sold Cobra Beer to and a loyal customer for nearly 1/3rd of a century!”

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, too, expressed his sorrow at the closure of this iconic eatery. In a heartfelt post on X (formerly Twitter) Tharoor wrote, “As the son of one of its founders, I lament the passing of an institution that served so many Indians (and not only Indians) for nearly three-quarters of a century. For many students, journalists and travellers, it was a home away from home, offering simple

and good quality Indian food at affordable prices as well as a convivial atmosphere to meet and maintain friendships.”  
[Click here](#) to read Rita’s full article. ■

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*If you’d like to make a contribution to the quarterly CJA newsletter, contact [debbieransome@gmail.com](mailto:debbieransome@gmail.com) with the heading ‘CJA Newsletter’*

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