



Commonwealth Journalists Association

NEWSLETTER

June 2023

## President's Report

### **CJA President Chris Cobb writes from Ottawa:**

It was while I was covering media for a chain of Canadian newspapers that I came upon a new publication in the United States—a community newspaper in the state of New Mexico.

The newspaper, a twice monthly if I recall correctly, was devoted exclusively to good news. Any story with a hint of negativity was disqualified.

I was intrigued.

I interviewed the publisher/editor who was a pleasant fellow convinced that there were enough people tired of a diet of bad news to make his new 'good news' publication a viable advertising vehicle that would last.

He was wrong.

This CJA newsletter is devoted to journalists, journalism, and news media outlets across the Commonwealth. The news we gather and distribute from our various contributors is uniformly negative.

This, of course, is because the situation for journalists in so many countries is negative for one reason or another.

In too many countries, journalists are harassed and abused physically, emotionally and financially. Some are killed for the work they do. What's so good news about any of that?

However, there's been chatter in our newsletter community about injecting some good news into this publication.



## President's Report

But do any of our readers—do you—want to read it?

Probably not, according to psychologist Tom Stafford who wrote on the BBC News website that as readers, listeners and viewers, we're attracted to doom and gloom and disaster stories, even without realizing it.

But why?

Do we really want a daily diet of political corruption, war and disaster.

When people say they would like good news for a change, do they really?

As Stafford wrote, our attraction to bad news may be more complex than just journalistic cynicism feeding a hunger for audience negativity.

Stafford based his column on the work by Canadian researchers Marc Trussler and Stuart Soroka at McGill University in Montreal. They [set up an experiment](#), at McGill University to better understand how people relate to news.

Trussler and Soroka invited participants from the university community to come to their lab for 'a study of eye tracking.' It wasn't really about eye tracking but to say otherwise risked prejudicing the experiment.

Volunteers were first asked to select some stories about politics from a news website and the researchers measured their eye movements as they read.

They were told it was important that they actually read the articles, for their eye movements to be measured as accurately as possible, but they were also told it didn't matter what they read.

Volunteers then answered questions on the kind of political news they would like to read.



Participants often chose stories with a negative tone rather than neutral or positive stories. People who were more interested in current affairs and politics were especially attracted to bad news.

However, when asked, these volunteers said they much preferred good news and said that news media was too focussed on negative stories. Figure that one out.

I'm not doing justice to the depth of the McGill University experiments but the researchers presented their experiment as solid evidence of a so called '[negativity bias](#),' a psychologists' term for our collective hunger to hear, and remember, bad news.

This, said the researchers, was proof that humans have a built-in negativity bias.

That means we pay more attention to, and are more affected by, negative stimuli compared to positive ones.

This bias has evolutionary roots. It helped our ancestors detect and respond to potential threats in their environment. It's why goes the theory, that bad news tends to capture our attention more easily and elicit stronger emotional reactions.

Which means that we're wired to react quickly to potential threats so we can avoid danger. Basically, a survival mechanism. And threats always come in the form of bad news.

The McGill researchers also evidence that [people respond quicker to negative words](#).

In Dutch lab experiments, flash the word "cancer", "bomb" or "war" up at someone and they hit a button in response quicker than if that word is "baby", "smile" or "fun" (despite these pleasant words being slightly more common).

Apparently, we are also able to recognise negative words faster than positive words, and even tell that a word is going to be unpleasant before we can tell exactly what the word is going to be.

Negative words in headlines are also an attention grabber.

There's another interpretation for our attraction to bad news that Trussler and Soroka suggest: We pay attention to bad news, because overall, we think the world is a better place than it is.

So, is every day a bad news day or is there good news out there that tends to get pushed aside by journalists who focus on the negative because they think that's what our audiences want to read.

Dear readers of this newsletter. Can you counter these arguments with good news that people will want to read?

If so, send your submissions to our esteemed newsletter editor [Debbie Ransome](#).



Chris Cobb is CJA President.

## Ramphal Institute Launches Patsy Robertson Memorial Prize



### THE RAMPHAL INSTITUTE

The Ramphal Institute has launched its inaugural Patsy Robertson Memorial Prize. The award will be presented by the Ramphal Institute in memory and recognition of its late Chairperson, long-standing Trustee, and influential media spokesperson for the

Commonwealth, Jamaican-born journalist-turned diplomat, Patsy Robertson. Patsy was the Chair of the Institute until her death in 2020. She also worked closely with the Commonwealth Journalists Association from its establishment.

This is an annual award presented to a young journalist or person (under 30) in the Commonwealth, or Commonwealth resident, that has made a significant contribution to championing policy and practical changes in their community or society on climate change and sustainability including blue economy; good governance; and trade and economic issues affecting people living in a Commonwealth country or region, particularly minorities and marginalized communities.

More details on the award can be found [here](#) ■

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### AI makes our journalism even more important

[The Conversation EDU wrote:](#) ‘The sad truth is that reliable sources of information are thin on the ground and increasingly hard to finance given the collapsing media business models. The bright hope offered by digital start-ups like Vice and BuzzFeed has vanished in recent weeks as they are shuttered or sold. Meanwhile most traditional media companies can’t make enough money to operate the sorts of newsrooms they once did. So they



concentrate on breaking news and big investigations and many of the things that matter most – education, health, science, arts, public policy – are glossed over.’

*[Editor’s note: Chris Cobb tackled the issue of fake news and its challenges in [the last edition](#) of the CJA newsletter. Catch up with [CJA reporting on our website.](#) ■*



### **Twitter’s shrinking role as traffic source for news publishers revealed**

[The Press Gazette writes:](#) Twitter – already a small source of clicks for publishers – has further declined in importance as a traffic referrer in recent years. ■



### **Peak paywall? What Time’s move to free online model means for news industry**

[From the Press Gazette:](#) Why the move away from paywalls at companies like Time and Quartz does not indicate a market tipping over. ■

## **CJA-UK Chair Raymond Whitaker writes:**

May 2 was the 30th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, but at an event co-hosted by CJA-UK at the House of Lords, it was agreed that media freedom was under threat as never before.

A distinguished panel moderated by CJA-UK executive member William Horsley detailed the proliferating challenges to what Karuna Nundy, an advocate before the Supreme Court of India, called “truth tellers”. In addition to physical attacks and disappearances, which were subject to growing impunity, technology had increased the dangers to journalists in multiple ways.

Not only was it much easier to track and troll journalists, social media also facilitated the spread of disinformation and hate speech. The internet had also contributed to what Lord Guy Black, deputy chairman of the Telegraph Media Group, described as “the collapse of the old business model” of journalism.

Another front in the war on media freedom is the use of the law to harass journalists, whether by the state bringing charges of “insulting the dignity” of officials or institutions, or by wealthy individuals seeking to tie up critics in expensive court proceedings. Maria Ordzhonikidze, director of the Justice for Journalists Foundation, said London was “unfortunately” a leading centre for SLAPPs (strategic litigation against public participation). She called for action to deter bringing such cases, to have them dismissed early and to prevent prohibitively high legal costs.

Amberin Zaman, former Turkey correspondent of The Economist, detailed the pressure and threats that prevented her returning home. After President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called her “scum”, she was subjected to what she called “cyber lynching”, but complained that when it came to Turkey, democracies – including Britain – prioritised good relations over press freedom.

The New Zealand-born human rights lawyer Kingsley Abbott, newly-appointed director of London University’s Commonwealth

Studies Institute pointed out that many of the laws used to restrict free speech in Commonwealth countries dated from the colonial era. Work was needed to do away with this legacy, and to foster the rule of law, as opposed to “rule by law”. ■

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## Cameroon

### **Cameroon journalists protest**

[VOA reported in May](#) that in Cameroon scores of journalists in the country's troubled Northwest region have protested after rebels claimed responsibility for killing their colleague. A separatist spokesman acknowledged their forces shot the newspaper reporter Anye Nde Nsoh, saying that they mistook him for a military officer.

Journalists in Cameroon's Northwest region say they staged a peaceful march on the streets of the regional capital Bamenda to condemn the killing of their colleague. ■

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## Ghana

### **Ghanaian journalist Abubakari Sadiq Gariba attacked, threatened by politician and aide**

[The Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#) called for Ghanaian authorities to ensure that the local politician and aide who recently assaulted and threatened to kill journalist Abubakari Sadiq Gariba are held to account.

CPJ's Africa program coordinator in New York Angela Quintal, said: "Authorities in Ghana must ensure justice is served after two men attacked and threatened journalist Abubakari Sadiq Gariba as he broadcast live ...Too often in Ghana, there is talk of investigations by police for attacks on journalists but there is no real accountability. Authorities must reverse this trend". ■

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## Guinea

### A Day without news

Although not a Commonwealth country, this was an interesting development in the African nation of Guinea in response to crackdowns on press freedom.

Nation Africa reported on [a 'Day without news' in Guinea as media snub junta](#). It said that Espace TV and Kalac TV posted an image of two hands pushing apart steel bars against a backdrop of the national colours of red, yellow and green, with "A Day Without Press" written underneath.

The paper reported that ‘Private media and online outlets in the West African state of Guinea on Tuesday launched a one-day boycott of news in protest at press and internet restrictions by the ruling junta. Other news outlets shared visual variations on the same theme, while radio stations played a selection of sombre music. The protest was announced Monday after the ruling military shut down two radio stations owned by the Afric Vision group, limited access to popular websites and social media, and threatened to close any media that "undermines national unity.’ Telecommunications Minister Ousmane Gaoual Diallo has denied any crackdown against Afric Vision or blocking of the internet.’

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## Nigeria

### Nigeria at the crossroads after disputed election

Chimaobi Omeje, of the Commonwealth’s Young Correspondents Network, writes: Africa’s biggest democracy, Nigeria, is currently facing her toughest test since the 1967-1970 civil war where millions of Nigerians lost their lives. [We are battling corruption more than ever in our history, terrorism \(insurgency and banditry\), secessionism, a debt crisis, police brutality, among other things. Because of this, many will argue that Nigeria is a failed state or is very close to becoming one.](#) But while the country might be facing unprecedented troubles, it is still not too late to use our collective effort to turn around the country’s fortunes.

*This article first appeared in Your Commonwealth. It was written before the disputed Presidential election in February in which Bola Tinubu was declared winner. The full article can be found [on the CJA website](#).*

# Americas

## Canada

### Canada news boss urges global peers to stick to their guns in battle with big tech

Paul Deegan believes it is in Google and Facebook's "self-interest" to have news on their platforms.

[The Press Gazette writes](#): Canada news boss urges global peers to stick to their guns in battle with big tech. The head of [Canada](#)'s news industry trade body has told publishers in other countries not to be "intimidated" by threats from Google and Facebook as more jurisdictions pursue legislation to force the duopoly to pay for news.

As the Online News Act has made its way through Ottawa's parliament, Google and Facebook have both issued stark warnings to Canada's politicians and publishers. Google has experimented with [blocking some users' access to news](#), while Facebook has said the bill could force it to [remove news from its platforms in Canada](#).

But Paul Deegan, the president and chief executive of News Media Canada, which represents 560 publishers across the country, is confident that the tech giants will come to recognise it is in their "self-interest" to retain news on their platforms. ■

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## Trinidad and Tobago

### Covid and domestic violence in Trinidad & Tobago

Caribbean journalist [Natalee Legore reported on the rise in domestic violence](#) in Trinidad & Tobago during the Covid lockdown and the response by national authorities. As part of the Caribbean Investigative Journalism Network (CIJN), she looked at "How the Trinidad and Tobago Government Fell Short. Survivors share their stories of lockdown abuse".

Find out more about [the CIJN](#). ■



## **Veteran Caribbean journalist Ken Richards dies**

Debbie Ransome writes: I don't usually insert my own views while editing this newsletter but Ken Richards was a journalist respected across the Caribbean whose passing deserves note in the wider Commonwealth. When I served as a producer and then head of the BBC's Caribbean Service in the 1990s and 2000s, Ken Richards was the producer I worked with for the longest period during my time at the BBC's World service. A Dominica Broadcasting Service programme about his life, aired on the day of his funeral, 12th June, captured his fun-loving, living-to-the-full nature in a career which spanned music, journalism and mentoring. It also reflected on his strength as a journalist, often standing up to then Dominican Prime Minister Eugenia Charles. Following his death, the current [Dominica Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit paid tribute to Ken](#) during a news conference. Ken represented that generation of journalists who lived life to the full but never allowed a bad edit or one-sided news to be broadcast – one of the professionals who laid the way for the current crop of journalists across the Commonwealth.

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# Asia

## **India**

The Guardian's Global Development reported in May on **a Delhi newspaper run by homeless children.**

[The paper said that Balaknama newspaper](#) (Hindi for the “voice of children”) is a newspaper produced by children who live and work on the streets. It reports on sexual abuse, police brutality and child labour, written by teenagers, have transformed lives in India. It added that “about 90 batuni (oral) reporters, under 18 and mostly illiterate, collect stories for the eight-page tabloid, passing on news from their neighbourhoods to four writers and editors, who then verify the details and write the stories”.

## **Indian soldiers beat three journalists in Manipur**

The Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ) has called on the authorities in the northeast Indian state of Manipur to investigate the beating of journalists Soram Inaoba, Nongthombam Johnson, and Brahmacharimayum Dayananda. [The CPJ said that](#), according to news sources, soldiers with the Indian Army's Jat Regiment assaulted the



three journalists while they were covering a fire in the New Checkon area of Imphal, the state capital. They reportedly dragged them from the building where they were reporting, tore their vests emblazoned with the word “Press,” and beat them with batons. Beh Lih Yi, CPJ’s Asia program coordinator. “Journalists in Manipur must be able to do their work safely and without fear of harassment and abuse by soldiers.” ■

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## Pakistan

The ongoing standoff between the army and former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his supporters has taken its toll on journalists in Pakistan. The [International Federation of Journalists \(IFJ\)](#) said in early June that: ‘In the wake of widespread unrest since the May 9 arrest of former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan, two journalists were allegedly abducted, with BOL News president and anchor Sami Abraham released by captors after one week, and journalist and YouTuber Imran Riaz Khan remaining missing for almost a month. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) joins its affiliate, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), in urging the Pakistani authorities to ensure Khan’s immediate release and allow all journalists to operate without fear of arrest or intimidation.’



Imran Khan (Wikimedia)

[Dawn newspaper said](#): ‘It gives insight into the obduracy of those in whose custody Imran Riaz Khan is being held that multiple appeals from various quarters have not had even the slightest effect. The anchorperson was [arrested](#) on May 11 from Sialkot airport by law-enforcement agencies on charges of hate speech, two days after [violent protests](#) erupted countrywide in the wake of [Imran Khan’s arrest](#). Released later that day, he was immediately picked up by ‘unknown persons’. Since then, despite court orders, condemnation by rights groups and journalists’ organisations, and his father’s emotional appeal before the Lahore High Court, nothing has been heard of him. His lawyer has stated a few times that he has learnt through his own initiative that Mr Khan is alive and well and may soon be released. One hopes this is indeed the case, though that cannot be allowed to deflect from the brazen illegality of his abduction and his detention beyond the reach of his family and legal counsel. The pattern of Mr Khan’s disappearance is the same as that of others before him — flat-out denials by law enforcement and intelligence agencies of any knowledge of his whereabouts, as though feigned ignorance when a citizen vanishes into thin air is a fitting, or sufficient, response.’ ■

**Also in Pakistan:**

[Journalists harassed, 1 beaten after opposition protest coverage in Pakistan](#)

[Journalists arrested and attacked, media offices set ablaze amid Pakistan protests](#) ■

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# Europe

United Kingdom

## UK: Complaints over arrest of journalist at coronation coverage



### [The Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#)

called for the British authorities to drop any criminal investigation into journalist Rich Felgate and ensure that members of the press can cover protests without fear of arrest. The CPJ said that, on 6 May, police arrested Felgate, a freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker, while he covered an environmental protest held during King Charles III's

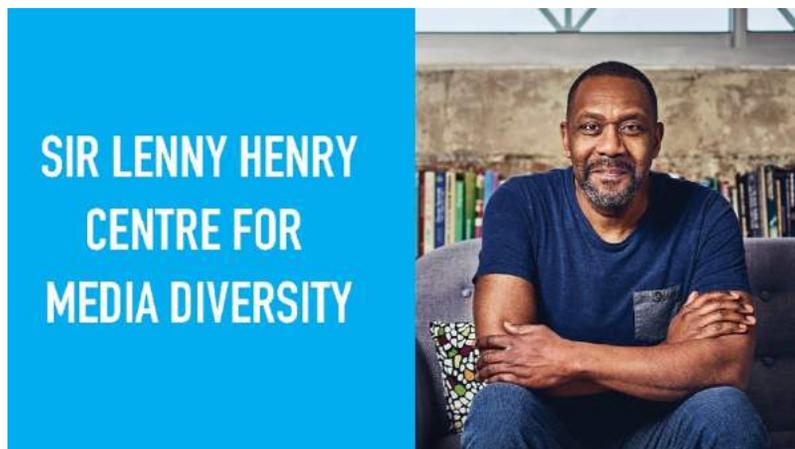
coronation, according to [news reports](#) and the journalist, who spoke to the CPJ.

Authorities held him for about 18 hours on suspicion of “conspiracy to cause a public nuisance,” and released him on bail pending investigation. Felgate told the CPJ that he is required to report back to police on 4 August.

Felgate is being investigated under Section 78 of the [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act](#), adopted in 2022, which human rights [groups](#) have [criticized](#) for granting police vague and undefined powers to restrict protests. Convictions under the act can carry up to 10 years in prison. ■

## LGBTQ journalists in UK call out lack of employer support amid increased abuse

[The Press Gazette](#) said that LGBTQ journalists face high levels of abuse and little employer support, according to a new study.



([Lenny Henry.net](#))

The Gazette reported that ‘LGBTQ journalists in the UK see their job as increasingly dangerous due to widespread online abuse targeting their sexual identity and gender orientation, according to a new study. More than four in five respondents (82%) to a survey [commissioned by the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity](#) at Birmingham University said they had faced trolling, meaning online comments deliberately intended to upset someone. Over half (56%) said they had faced homophobic harassment. Almost four in five (78%) felt it was increasingly dangerous to work as an LGBTQ journalist in the UK. Abusive emails with death threats, homophobic abuse while on press trips and abusive comments under stories were among the forms of abuse and harassment reported by participants.’ ■

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## 2 May, Westminster UNA co-hosts World Press Freedom Day meeting in parliament.

To mark the thirtieth anniversary of World Press Freedom Day, Westminster UNA and the Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM) at the University of Sheffield, together with the Commonwealth Journalists Association and the Association of European Journalists, hosted a meeting in parliament titled ‘Towards Press Freedom, new hope or false dawn?’

In his introduction the meeting's moderator William Horsley, CFOM's international director and UK Chair of the Association of European Journalists, referred to the historic anniversary to be marked at the UN in New York the following day. Meanwhile, here in the UK, he reminded his audience that the University of Sheffield also hosts the UNESCO chair for Media Freedom worldwide, underlying the UN-wide commitment to the safety and journalists and international recognition of the dangers of states assuming a sense of impunity.

More on this meeting can be found on [the UN Westminster website](#) ■



*Can the Commonwealth survive without free speech?* This was the title of an article written by CJA executive member William Horsley for the CJA website.

William wrote: “Is it time to scrap the Commonwealth?” The question was met with laughter when asked at a gathering of Commonwealth insiders last January in Windsor Great Park, but it was meant seriously.

Joel Kibazo, a former spokesperson for the Commonwealth Secretariat, observed that in times past the organisation earned international respect for standing up against apartheid and taking strong action against member states that trampled on democratic values. But today young people just don’t care because the organisation seems to have nothing substantial to say. Its budget and capacity for action are much diminished. Discontented states have withheld their membership dues. So why not “put the Commonwealth out of its misery?”

Despite the pomp around the annual Commonwealth Day celebrations in London in March, such doubts are often voiced at Commonwealth-related gatherings nowadays. Many grass roots organisations do valuable work to benefit communities in countries that are geographically far apart, but a distinct hollowing out of democratic institutions has been evident to a greater or lesser extent in Commonwealth countries in every region of the world. If unchallenged, that drift away from international standards and norms will represent an existential threat to the organisation’s survival.

How states deal with the right to free expression – with respect and self-restraint or with coercion and censorship – is a defining issue of the 21st century.

The full article can be read [on the CJA website](#). ■



## NEW CJA NEWSLETTER FEATURE: "I was there"

**On a regular basis, we plan to feature some of your accounts of covering important stories in the Commonwealth, tapping into the vast experience of CJA members.**

**We start with CJA Cameroon President Ebenezer W. Motale.**

I was there...to interview the President when no other Reporter was.

It was a cool Wednesday morning in Yaounde on November 9, 1996. I left home for work unprepared for the momentous experience that awaited me later that day. That morning I had been assigned to cover the activity of a pro-regime youth movement that had been fervently promoting the ideology of the President and ruling party in its one year of existence. Their aim on that crispy Yaounde morning was to march from the Yaounde city centre to the presidency of the republic, a distance of four miles. Their avowed goal was to meet and hand their memorandum to a top official there. Chatting with the youth leader before take-off, it became clear that they were seeking greater youth representation, empowerment and involvement in their various communities.

Finally they took off, traffic was diverted away from their route and in their frustration taxi drivers and opposition party members could be heard hurling insults at them. But they finally made it to the high gates of the presidency where they waited and waited. The expected official wasn't turning up and there was a serious sense of anxiety. Just as the youth leaders began to wonder what was amiss, a small convoy of three cars suddenly appeared driving slowly from the presidential residence known as Unity Palace. The direction was the sprawling forecourt of the presidential entrance. To the utter surprise of everyone, the President, Paul Biya and the First lady, Chantal Biya emerged from a car. It is worth noting that President Paul Biya who came to power in 1982,

hardly grants interviews to the national press except during presidential election campaigns when he tours the country. But this day was different. He was definitely motivated by the objectives of the Movement that was bearing his name, President Biya Youth or PRESBY for short.

What happened next was going to be the most momentous moment of my 30-career that was ahead of me. The President moved toward the camera crew, clearly intent to pass a message to the entire youth of the country. I wasn't prepared for this and within seconds the most powerful individual in Cameroon was standing inches away from me, waiting for my question. My immediate dilemma was, what language would I use – an English-speaking reporter faced with a French-speaking President with little notions of English. I immediately settled for realism and common sense; I thought the Chief executive would be addressing the majority of his people. After two questions, the Head of State retired to his quarters and I was left to savour the historic moment. Ever since, I have not stopped relishing this day when I became, one of only a few journalists in Cameroon, to interview President Biya.

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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# AND FINALLY...

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism reported on projects aiming to focus on indigenous journalists and audiences.

Reuters said that they “face similar challenges, from lack of funding to engaging with audiences who are often offline and difficult to reach”.

Read more on [projects putting Indigenous voices at the heart of their journalism](#).

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Find out more about the [Commonwealth Journalists Association](#) ■

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