

Commonwealth Journalists Association

NEWSLETTER

June 2026

## President's Report

*'Minds that seek revenge destroy states, while those that seek reconciliation build nations.'*

- Nelson Mandela

### CJA President Chris Cobb writes:

With the constant distractions on the international scene during the early part of this year, the long-awaited national election in Bangladesh passed with little fanfare.

The new BNP government was installed with the promise of a return to democracy with all its attendant fairness and freedoms—none of which have been granted to a group of prominent journalists locked up without charge and without due process.

A reminder: The journalists in question were incarcerated in Bangladesh on spurious charges of murder related to the student uprising almost two years ago.

Another reminder: Bangladesh is a member nation of the Commonwealth—a family of nations built on the values of democracy, justice, and the rule of law.

Instead of correcting this wrong, the new Bangladesh government seems to be doubling down on its ill treatment of these incarcerated journalists and eyeing future control of journalists and journalism.

Two, Farzana Rupa and Mozammel Babu, have now been charged with crimes against humanity for their reporting. The charges have been filed under the country's own international criminal law statute.

As the Commonwealth Journalists Association, Amnesty International and other international journalist advocates have said many times, the arrest and imprisonment of these reporters and editors is not about justice. It's about revenge.

And as Committee to Protect Journalists Asia-Pacific Program Coordinator Kunāl Majumder noted.

“Editorial decisions on covering a contested political incident are not crimes against humanity. Using an international criminal law framework to punish journalists circumvents the basic protections guaranteed to the press under Bangladesh's own constitution.”

CJA Vice-President Shyamal Dutta has been imprisoned without trial now for more than 600 days. He is sick with a serious heart condition and, according to his family, in deteriorating mental health. Others are in various states of ill health and distress.

Details are sketchy but the CJA has heard that some other journalists have been released on bail. It is a start.

But amnesty appeared to fade with a statement in early May by the Prime Minister's Information Adviser, Zahed Ur Rahman.

Murder charges against the detained journalists were the 'wrong move', he said because they are partially responsible for crimes against humanity—a much 'graver' crime than murder.

Incredibly, he then referred to the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, where people who 'shaped narratives' were brought to justice.

So where does the Commonwealth and its Secretariat stand on this? India, Canada and a few other members have expressed concern. As a single potentially powerful voice, the Commonwealth as a group has been silent and ineffective.

These are leaders who, at their last summit in Samoa, [adopted groundbreaking media principles](#) crafted by Commonwealth civil society groups.

The Commonwealth has a history of tolerating member governments that flagrantly contravene the values of the 'family.'

But silence only deepens the damage.

If the organization fails to respond when core democratic rights are violated, it becomes an irrelevant club of convenience rather than a strong and powerful community of principles.

It's time for the Commonwealth to step in and tell this new Bangladesh government that enough is enough.

The Bangladesh past has been replete with many horrors and abuses. Its government desperately needs international help. Its people deserve a brighter future.

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison. When he was released, with power at his disposal, he chose reconciliation over retribution.

His lesson? We obsess over the past at the expense of the future.

**Chris Cobb, CJA President and William**

**Horsley, CJA Executive Committee**



## World Press Freedom Day



**William Horsley**, CJA Executive Member, & **Ehsan Ahmed Sehar**, RMNP President, led the conversations on World Press Freedom Day (WPF) this past May 3rd.

### **William reflected:**

To mark World Press Freedom Day, the CJA co-hosted an interactive seminar on May 1 with [YourCommonwealth](#) on [Press Freedom in the Commonwealth: Challenges, Protection, and the Path Forward](#). Younger journalists from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and Europe shared their experiences of media freedom under severe attack. Kenyan journalist Joyce Wachau, CJA India member Jayanta Chowdhury from India and William Horsley in the UK made presentations. Joyce said every week journalists are unlawfully detained, their equipment is destroyed, and some are even killed. “Who will be held accountable,” she asked, “when journalists come to harm while chasing the truth?” The ensuing lively debate focused on how to achieve strong protections against attacks and abuses, as promised by all 56 member governments when they adopted the [Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance](#). Faced with this stifling and widespread assault on press freedom, several participants said the Commonwealth *must* establish proper accountability mechanisms so that journalists can work safely and without external interference.

[🔗 Read the full write up](#)

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, which partnered with the CJA to drive through the adoption of the [Media Principles](#) two years ago, now says it is vital that Parliamentarians take a stand to ensure that parliaments uphold the principles of media freedom and expression and promote good governance in the Commonwealth. In an invitation blog for the CPA’s journal *The Parliamentarian*, CJA Executive Member William Horsley put forward concrete proposals on [How can Parliaments ensure that media freedoms are upheld](#). He suggests that MPs should prioritise the repeal of all over-punitive laws that obstruct the essential work of journalists, and work with media and other stakeholders to secure safe and fair conditions during election periods, when attacks against media workers, public protests, and campaigners often peak.



 Read more:

- [RMNP Presents Sadiq Press Freedom Awards to Syed Azhar Ali Rizvi and Late Syed Sarfraz Hussain Zaidi](#)
- [RMNP Marks 25th Consecutive World Press Freedom Day Round Table, Raises Alarm Over Growing Curbs on Regional Media](#)

More on WPF - **William writes:**

A well-attended meeting in London focused on [Reporting Under Fire: Journalism, Conflict and Media Freedom](#). Reporters Without Borders (RSF) unveiled its 2026 World Press Freedom Index showing that media freedom has reached a 25-year low. Speakers included Christina Lamb, the Sunday Times chief foreign correspondent and Andriy Dubchak, a prominent war reporter in Ukraine. Felicity Garvey of RSF said the situation had grown so bad that the big question now is “whether or not a journalist can survive long enough to bear witness”.

 Explore related stories around WPF:

- [We can't talk about press freedom without talking about misogyny](#)
- [Modi's Norway Visit Raises Fresh Questions on India's Global Press Freedom Image](#)
- [World Press Freedom Day Conference convened in Lusaka amid growing global media challenges](#)
- [As journalists duck for cover, a legal expert suggests an unconventional shield](#)
- [Governments, wake up! Stop the attacks on truth-tellers](#)





## Uganda

### Uganda

#### **Alice Drito writes from Uganda:**

Uganda joined the rest of the world to celebrate World Press Freedom Day on 3 May with a march by journalists, media supporters, media personalities and some figures from media regulatory bodies and government in the capital Kampala to support press freedom under the theme “Shaping a Future of Peace”. The sub-theme in Kigali was “Promoting Press Freedom for Human Rights, Development, and Security in Uganda”.

The day’s speeches emphasized the promotion of a responsible press, ethical journalism and the safety and protection of journalists. Officials called on journalists to guard against fake and hate news, made easier by digital platforms.

Uganda’s Press Freedom Status improved by twelve places in the World Press Freedom Index in 2026 to 131. This is in comparison to the 143rd position in 2025 out of 180 countries. According to Reporters Without Borders, this follows successive years of downward rankings.

Some journalists attributed the improvement in ranking to the sustained media freedom advocacy campaigns adopted by media freedom rights bodies and wider civil society groups, directed against actions by media regulatory bodies. There are plans for increased court actions against the state on other media laws.

To date some of these laws have been struck down in Supreme and Constitutional Court battles. The Publication of false news law and sedition laws were nullified in 2004 and 2010 respectively. In March 2026, the Constitutional Court overturned the Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act, 2022 on procedural grounds, ruling on the basis that the parliament had passed the bill without the mandatory required quorum.

The inauguration of Yoweri Museveni following his re-election for what will make seven consecutive terms extending his rule to 45 years by 2031. Journalists also used World Press Freedom Day to reflect on his four decades reign and question what this means for media freedom in Uganda. Some speakers called for accountability and answers for what the incoming government has in the pipeline for the media freedom agenda.

However, journalists also acknowledged key media freedom milestones, noting the changes in policy directions for liberalisation of broadcast media in 1993 which led to the booming media industry. To date, Uganda has about 300 radio stations, 30 TV channels, two daily newspapers and a weekly newspaper, most of which are privately owned.

The Constitutional guarantee under Article 29, which provides for freedom of expression and media was noted though some journalists argued that emerging unfriendly media policies and legislations continue to demonise journalists. Speakers also pointed to the institutional structures and media regulatory bodies, including the Uganda Communications Commission, the Uganda Media Council and Media Centre.

Journalists further reflected on the number of arrests, physical assaults on journalists which have become the new normal, biting censorship, destruction of journalists' equipment by security officers, high-stakes prosecutions, internet shutdowns and the torching and raiding of media houses in Uganda.

Speakers called for assurances from the authorities for fair media laws, access to public information, decent salaries, the safety and protection of journalists and treatment with respect while pursuing their duties, including election coverage, when hostility and brutality against journalists hit the highest peak.





United  
Kingdom

**Raymond Whitaker, CJA-UK Chair, writes from the UK:**

At their last gathering in Samoa, Commonwealth heads of government adopted the Media Principles long campaigned for by members of CJA-UK. The next step is to press for implementation of those principles.

CJA-UK is proposing that before elections in Commonwealth countries, a forum should be held in which relevant bodies including representatives of the press, broadcasting and social media, as well as political parties, law enforcement and governing authorities, agree to adopt the principles and commit themselves to a clean campaign.

There are hopes that the first such forum will take place before an election this year in a Commonwealth country – more details in the next newsletter.

Meanwhile, Amir Ali Bhat, a journalist from Indian-administered Kashmir, is at Wolfson College, Cambridge as a Derek Ingram Press Fellow. Funded by the fellowship set up in memory of the co-founder of the Commonwealth Journalists Association, those selected are able to spend 10 weeks at Cambridge researching a topic relevant to journalism and media freedom.

It is disappointing that a second Fellow was selected, but refused a visa by the British authorities, despite representations from Wolfson College and the CJA. His identity has to remain confidential, in the hope that he may be able to take up the fellowship in the future.

A previous Fellow whose visa was denied succeeded on appeal, but when the CJA International conference was held in London 10 years ago, several delegates had visas refused, too late to have the decision overturned. This does not seem to be the way to engender favourable attitudes towards Britain among influential voices in the Commonwealth.

## Asia

***India Today* writes: How Indian courts are grappling with the 'right to be forgotten'**

‘A decade ago, the problem barely existed. A court case ended, a newspaper clipping yellowed in archives, and the world moved on. Today, a single Google search can resurrect a person’s past in seconds—an arrest report, a divorce judgment or a criminal trial that ended in acquittal. A decade ago, a court case faded with time. Today, a Google search can revive it instantly.

As Indians increasingly seek to erase digital traces of past litigation, courts are facing a surge of petitions invoking what is known as the Right to be Forgotten (RTBF)—the ability to remove or delink personal information from the internet once it becomes irrelevant or unfair.’

 [Read the full article](#)



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## Oceania

***MSN* covers: Australia's public broadcaster hit by staff walkout**

‘Hundreds of journalists went on strike Wednesday at Australia's main public broadcaster, demanding better pay and protections to stop artificial intelligence taking their jobs.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation was forced to replace live programming with pre-recorded shows after more than 2,000 journalists and staff called a 24-hour strike.


It is the first major strike to hit the broadcaster in around 20 years.’

 [Read the full article](#)



**The *Samoa Observer* reports: Observer journalists blocked from Luxon coverage despite JAWS membership**

‘Samoa Observer photographers and a reporter were prevented from covering the matai bestowal ceremony for New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, despite registering with the Journalists Association of Western Samoa, as requested by government officials.’

 [Read the full article](#)

***The Associated Press* highlights: An Australian journalist turns her harrowing China prison ordeal into a memoir and play**

‘After three years as a prisoner in Beijing, Cheng Lei is busy rebuilding her life. She’s written a memoir and a play, tried her hand at stand-up comedy and is pursuing her career as a journalist.

“I think when your life gets shattered and you lose so many things that used to define you, you do have a kind of freedom to reorganize your atoms and create a new you,” Cheng told The Associated Press during rehearsals for a play about her incarceration, “1154 Days.”

 [Read the full article](#)



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# Europe

**The *Times of Malta* writes: When rulers turn on those asking too many questions**

‘The US President’s online broadside against the late Robert Mueller, after his passing on March 20, 2026, highlighted the extreme opprobrium endured by those tasked with holding a sitting ruler to account, even beyond the grave.

Mueller, a respected war hero, lawyer, and public servant, was admired across party lines for his competence and nonpartisanship. Yet his

service as Special Counsel during the thorough ‘Russiagate’ investigation exposed him to political pressure and public criticism from Trump’s camp, and others’ failed attempts to smear him for sexual misconduct.’

 [Read the full article](#)

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# Africa

***The Continent* covers “Massive media deal gives mogul the megaphone in East Africa”**

‘THE NATION Media Group is widely regarded as one of the most important media houses in Africa. In its East African stronghold, its outlets set the news agenda from Dar es Salaam to Nairobi and Kampala. That space has been guaranteed by its majority shareholder for the last 66 years, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development.

A sale has been rumoured for months, and this week the fund confirmed that Tanzanian billionaire Rostam Azizi would buy its 54% share of the group, worth 1.2-billion Kenyan shillings (about \$9.5 million).

The acquisition gives Azizi significant influence over the board composition and strategic direction of the largest independent media house in East and Central Africa.

“It feels like the last nail in the coffin of one of the beacons of African journalism,” political analyst Nanjala Nyabola told *The Continent*.

Churchill Otieno, president of the Africa Editors Forum, received the news with similar unease. “The question in the sale of Nation Media Group is not simply who owns the newsroom, but whether the new custodians understand that media freedom is not a commodity to be traded. It is a public trust that underwrites democracy itself.

 [Read the full article](#) (from Page 11)

## ***Press Gazette* reports: Health coverage is getting killed by Google AI Overviews**

‘Looking at data from three months at the start of 2026, Sistrix estimates that health sections on major news brands will have seen links to articles supplanted by an AI-written summary 72% of the time in Google search results.

Sistrix has found that for keywords where an AI Overview appears at the top of Google’s search results, the average rate of people clicking on the first search result drops from 27% to 11%, meaning a clickthrough decline of almost 60%.

Steve Paine, marketing manager at Sistrix, told *Press Gazette*: “The results here show that some topics carry much higher risk than others. If your business model relies on clicks from search, assess the exposure rate and consider focusing on low-exposure topics and niches.

“Health is a high-value topic and Google appears to want to take control of that. Other topics such as sports, that might be harder or more expensive for Google to track, have a much lower rate of exposure.

“My tip: Assess your AIO exposure rates and try to work as far ahead of an AI bot as possible, in low-exposure topic areas.”

 [Read the full article](#)

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☀️ Happy Summer from the CJA Newsletter Team! ☀️

If you’d like to contribute or make a suggestion to the CJA newsletter team, please email us; **Ben** is available at [bcarson9@uwo.ca](mailto:bcarson9@uwo.ca).

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