

The November Pledge

On November 19 everything clicked on the dot — the 8-party alliance led by AL, 7-party alliance led by BNP and the 5-party platform gave unto the nation the Joint Declaration from three different venues. The Declaration setting out the intents and purposes of the November upsurge is, by its catalytic power-performance, and not through the virtue of some effervescent rhetoric that most political protestations consist of, the most important document touching upon this nation's destiny, barring the constitution sans its many maulings and accretions. It is thus sacred.

On the third anniversary of the joint declaration it would be fit as well as fetching to compare the records of this society, specially the government, a direct progeny of that document, in the matter of materialising the goals set out there. Because the 1991 election rides upon all the expressions of state power since the 1973 polls as being validated beyond the latter through a democratic and fair mandate of the people, it is important that the weight of the Declaration and the government's obligations to it be spelled out and clearly understood by the government. It is true that the Declaration is somewhat short of a people's clear mandate which the results of the 1991 elections were. Although all of this country knows that the nation was as one body behind the Declaration and the March '91 results represented only a 33-ish per cent endorsement of the Party now ruling, no one till date has raised a question about the primacy between the two in the manifestation of state power. This cannot however detract from the significant position the Declaration has been elevated to by direct people's power what was an action plan by all political entities in the nation till April '91. After the formation of the government it transformed into a sacred moral code for both the government and all outside of it to abide by. The Joint Declaration of November 19 is the moral core that should guide each and all action of the government transcending the ruling party's set of own guidelines.

There are indeed big black holes in the government's materialisation of the goals of the Declaration which was indeed a solemn pledge to the whole people. Restoration of the spirit of the Liberation War, rather than achieved, dangles as a contentious issue. Politics of killings and conspiracy has hardly been gotten rid of and there has yet to be structural changes making coups impracticable. All the black laws are alive and kicking and they have been given extra biting power by a very dubious anti-terrorism law applied to date even more dubiously. The wholesale control of the radio and television rather than diminishing and paving the way for an eventual autonomy as envisaged in the Declaration, has only been consolidated to show the administration's dispensations in a bad light, at times so lurid as to seem a copy of the buffoonish, Ershadian projection on the miniscreen.

Not one word of the Joint Declaration runs counter to the wishes and the interests of our people. The government doesn't run the risk of moving into uncertain country by abiding by it — no, the government has nothing to fear if there are no black laws and if the electronic media becomes an independent body with judgement of its own. Contrarily, each day that passes without redeeming the letters of that sacred pledge to the people do diminish the government morally. And irreparably. Hark back then to the Joint Declaration, ye the parties to that glorious moral undertaking that salvaged the nation.

Fiasco at ZIA

An unfortunate and regrettable incident at Zia International Airport last Wednesday has led to a serious confrontation between our leading foreign exchange earning sector — the garments — and our customs officials. In the incident a leading garment exporter, and senior vice-president of the BGMEA, Nurul Haq Sikder, was severely beaten, handcuffed and tied to a chair for three hours when he returned home from Singapore by a Thai flight. As is usually the case, we have two conflicting versions from the two parties in the conflict. According to the customs officials, Sikder arrived dead drunk and caused all the trouble. As for BGMEA, the organisation of garment exporters, all blames belong to the customs officials, who are nothing better, according to them, than goons and ruffians.

Those who have used the ZIA, are aware the customs officials have a habit of assuming that every passenger is a smuggler till he/she is proven innocent. Yes there is a green channel, yet everyone passing through it has to have his or her luggage checked through an X-ray machine, answer a lot of unnecessary questions, quite often open bags, before he/she is allowed to pass. If one goes through the red channel, then the hassle is far more complex and of a very difficult kind.

On the side of the passengers, it cannot be denied that attempts are made to interfere with the work of the customs officials by pulling one's own rank, or that of his or her relations or friends.

The point that needs to be made here is that surely the customs officials have gone far beyond their limit in trying to handle an allegedly unruly passenger. The fact that he was carrying a CIP card should have made some impression upon the customs officials about the authenticity of this passenger. On the other hand, it is not credible that our customs officials started beating up somebody just like that.

Clearly, excesses have been made on both sides at the ZIA. Our attempt should now be to solve it as judiciously and lawfully as a civil society provides for. Already the government has formed an inquiry committee, whose work should be expedited and the guilty punished. This event should not be blown out of proportion by making it an issue of prestige between, institutions and organisations backing the two parties. Justice cannot be served when emotion takes the place of logic.

We urge all sides to let passions cool and the judicial process to have its sway. The most important thing is to learn from the incident. In most modern airports, customs formalities are being done away with. Airports in Pakistan have no customs check anymore. Even in stringent India, it has become very relaxed. This is the trend with trade liberalisation and lowering of tariff. What is now strictly checked for is drugs. Maybe with our economy becoming more and more open, we should drastically reform our customs practice. For the moment a strong case can be made for a more courteous and well-behaved customs force.

SHOULD we seek self-reliance or sustainable development? Professor Anisur Rahman, following his concept paper (as reported in The Daily Star dated September 8, 1993) on "Structural Transformation for Self-reliant Development of Bangladesh", would perhaps suggest that self-reliance must by definition lead to sustainability of development. According to him, cooperative initiatives of low income producer classes seem to offer promise for raising the country's reinvestment coefficient. However, it may lead to politically explosive as well as socially stabilising policy conclusions because the suggestions also imply generation of the surplus for investment from poor peasants and the landless by keeping the wage rates low and returns to farmers and therefore farm-gate prices, continually depressed.

Given the extent of poverty and landlessness, such a strategy may speak of self-reliance but of a perverse kind. It can never bring about sustainable development even in the longest possible run. As a result of the policy of extracting the surplus from the subsistence agriculture, the farmers are bound to revolt. The existing landownership and tenurial patterns would also make it impossible to extract the so-called surplus. In fact it might bring about revolt and conflicts in rural Bangladesh. Self-reliance must not mean breaking the backbone of the poor farmers. Such strategies had failed in the past

The Course of Our Development

— former Soviet Union is the prime example in this respect. The concept paper tried to revive the old growth models which today only glorify the archives of the London School of Economics. Both Mr Harrod and Domar are long dead and there is no such closed economy in the world today. Therefore to elaborate on a strictly internal growth regime will not serve any useful purpose.

Outward Strategy

History has shown that import substitution strategy does not work. The outward strategy of export-led growth is the answer to our economic stagnation and it is now well accepted by the major political parties of the country. The much sought after stable policy regime have been brought about. Therefore the self-reliant internal growth theory would only act as the sponner in the smooth running of the economic wheel of the nation. It is true, as Professor Anisur Rahman has mentioned, that most countries adopted import substitution policies; but he failed to mention that most of those countries have, by 1993, also abandoned such policies in favour of an open economy where movement of goods and services, capital and foreign exchange tend to be free from any government imposed controls.

There is, however, no doubt that self-reliance as an eco-

nomie objective of the nation is of considerable importance. The problem remains with its definition. In an outward looking economy, where growth is promoted primarily through expansion of manufactured exports, self-reliance would imply capacity to import through its own foreign exchange earnings and not to manufacture all required goods and services within the frontiers of the country. An import substituting industry, graduating into an export oriented enterprise over

struction sector. The self-reliant development, as envisaged by Professor Anisur Rahman will definitely discourage foreign direct investment since anything foreign ought to be against local initiative and enterprise. Perhaps it might bring about the revival of East India Company after few centuries since that Company also came originally as the foreign investor. But negating foreign investment inevitably means discouraging domestic investment as well. In

country would only contribute to such exodus by the multinationals. The urgent need now is to impress upon the foreign companies, who are long established in the country to expand their business so that others of both domestic and foreign origin are convinced of the future profitability of investment in Bangladesh.

Growth Maximization

The self-reliant development strategy for Bangladesh wishes to maximize reinvestment as well as income redistribution simultaneously — at the same time. This is not possible. Instead, let us try to maximize growth which will create jobs and income. In turn, our aspiration for a more egalitarian society will be automatically satisfied. If profitable opportunities are sustained, the returns from the existing export oriented enterprises will be ploughed back to expand the manufacturing sector itself. This is inevitable. What is essential is to create opportunities for growth inducing investments to take place and investment means employment — more so if such investments are focused on the labour-intensive manufacturing for export.

We have to give priority in investment allocation to those sectors which maximize employment and export earnings, regardless of the import coefficient of those investments since

export earnings would far outweigh the import demands generated by the investments. Thus the sectors to be promoted are textile including garments, leather including footwear, electronics, shrimp farming, rural aquaculture and horticultural products with an eye on the export markets.

Without competitive manufacturing, we are lost and this is amply borne out by the state of our rice economy today. The processing and marketing of paddy was never conceived in terms of export markets; as a result, we cannot sell abroad and being confined to the saturated internal market, the retail price of rice is now less than atta. Hence the priority to link with the world market is so very important and hence I am repeating the priority of export markets for our goods and services.

Professor Anisur Rahman wishes to revert back to his socialist days of early 1970s and he suggests that the free market policies need to be reviewed in the light of his self-reliant growth path for Bangladesh. The road to self-reliance however lies through exports and competitive manufacturing. Therefore, free market policies cannot be given up in order to look inward again.

Lenin once said that the road to Paris lies through Shanghai and Calcutta. People residing near Calcutta perhaps do not realise that Shanghai is now totally transformed into a free market heaven.



a period of time is not a realistic assumption in the context of Bangladesh. Because of the small size of the domestic market, the industry will fail to achieve the desired economies of scale. Unless from the very beginning, the industry is exposed to competition, it will be difficult if not impossible to achieve rapid manufacturing growth in the country. The garment industry expanded by leaps and bounds because it was securing its access to a huge global market while steel rolling mills could hardly attract any such success — being geared to the demand from the faltering domestic con-

Bangladesh the problem is lack of investment where the distinction between domestic and foreign is irrelevant. It may be noted that in spite of all the incentives offered, the established multinationals are trying to get out of the country and some well-known names, Phillips for example, have already left. This is because the investment climate is not regarded as conducive, and there are better opportunities elsewhere, particularly in the former centrally planned economies of Vietnam and China who have now gone all out for free markets. The internal growth models postulated by reputed economists of the

Ethnic Press Alive and Well in Australia

Evelyn A. Opilas writes from Sydney

IN spite of the growing number of publications for Australia's ethnic communities, the ethnic press and its journalists have relatively remained 'untouched' by this country's tough media laws.

Lately, mainstream newspaper journalists have taken centre-stage defending the journalists' code of ethics before Australian courts but ended up receiving tough convictions, among them jail sentences, community service and fines. Not so with members in the ethnic press who get little, token or no attention at all.

The latest Department of Immigration directory of ethnic community organisations lists about 126 ethnic publications in Australia. The Office of Multicultural Affairs says that 'the potential readership of all the ethnic language publications in Australia is as high as two million.'

Run by independent proprietors who may or may not have the appropriate journalistic background, ethnic publications are taken for granted as being relevant only to their particular communities.

Little notice is placed on the fact that a cursory look at newsagencies in New South Wales alone would show more titles of ethnic newspapers than English language ones, or that these ethnic publications are actually 'influential' in their own communities.

While no serious study on the matter has been made, there are 'admissions' within some ethnic communities that breaches of media laws exist, particularly with regard to copyright, defamation and unethical practice. Breaches of

copyright arise in cases where some ethnic press journalists translate material from the mainstream English-language press verbatim.

A lot of ethnic papers do that, the editor-publisher of a now defunct community newspaper claims. They even lift off text straight from the paper and paste it onto their own publications. I tried doing that once but I could not live with it. It is easy to distinguish which articles have just been pasted in from another newspaper, usually from local papers or those from their country of origin. The type setting is different.

Publishing in a language other than English makes it hard for regulatory bodies like the Australian Journalists Association branch of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, the Australian Press Council, courts of law or even mainstream newspapers' legal departments to run after ethnic publications which may be breaching copyright.

Adrian Demer of The Sydney Morning Herald's Legal Department says that occasionally, people write in to tell them that articles are being lifted from the Herald and published in the ethnic press. However, 'it is not something we get a great deal of complaints about. Monitoring them would take more time than is worth it,' he says.

Running after a publication is an expensive process. There isn't much money in the ethnic media and there's nothing to gain financially, says Meenakshi Ganjoo, former editor of The Indian Post, a recently-launched community paper for Sydney's growing Indian community.

To the Editor...

Expatriates

Sir, Remittances in millions of dollars a year from Bangladeshis abroad have substantially enriched Bangladeshi economy.

This vital foreign exchange saved out of their hard-earned wages should be well taken care of in terms of national development alongside optimum utilization of the potentials of the world's eighth largest population.

Bangladeshis working abroad are contributing to their nation-building with remittances — a favourable outcome of an export-oriented policy that helped Bangladesh manpower to be a profitable export commodity.

On the other hand, within the characteristic global brain drain are scores of Bangladeshis from all strata already in different countries looking for jobs and a number of them are faced with legal problems relating to employments.

Evidently, despite regulation, quite a few clever manpower dealers take advantage of the fortune seekers and supply them with fake employment and travel documents against exaggerated fees for the purpose. Immoral practice of this sort consequently earns international disrepute for the nation.

M Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh

PM's interview at Sugandha

Sir, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia grants interview to the members of the public listening to their problems and grievances at Sugandha office once in a week.

But it appears that some bureaucrats are perhaps creating obstacles in the way of people's contact with the Prime Minister

of our democratic government. It is alleged that many genuinely deserving persons are not being allowed to meet with the Prime Minister. If someone meets the Prime Minister and she kindly issues any instruction that also, allegedly, is not carried out with immediate effect.

I went to Sugandha office several times seeking an interview with the Prime Minister in connection with the exploration and commercial utilisation of the valuable minerals 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar (a national committee of which was formed by the Prime Minister herself) but every time I was asked by the officials at Sugandha to submit an application and I was told by them that I would be intimated the date of my interview with the Prime Minister later on. Over one and half years have lapsed since then but I have heard nothing from Sugandha so far.

Oll Kabir
Dhaka-1203

Jamuna bridge

Sir, We are worried to know that the Japanese team left the country without giving any final decision regarding financial assistance for construction of the Jamuna Bridge. It is getting delayed and due to delay in implementation the project cost may rise. The bridge project has been found viable by all local and international experts. The government has also initially spent good amount of money for preliminary work and completed lot of formalities. The ball is really now to roll. Any delay at this stage on any excuse will hamper the project very much.

The people of Bangladesh, have supported the construction of the bridge for equal distribution of the benefit of development in

Emphasis on English

Sir, Recently the government has taken a decision on posting of officials in English language to the Economic Relations Division (ERD). We very much appreciate this decision and sincerely hope that this rule will also be followed in case of foreign service appointments.

Another decision of the government to introduce English language in all sorts of undergraduate courses is also timely and useful. It is expected that the content of the said English course will be based on applied and practical usage of the English language.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

ing done of material from the mainstream media or if communities are vilifying each other. It goes back to the problems of ethnic media in terms of resources. Most are run on a small amount of money making it hard for them to research and get original material. It is also hard for them to ask trained staff who can have a more rewarding career outside the ethnic press to stay one,' she explains.

The ethnic press theoretically falls under the Australian Press Council in terms of regulations but people don't even realise it exists. The APC is not specifically targeted at ethnic communities so it does not en-

force advertising in the ethnic press. As it is funded by the big media companies, the APC has shown no interest in the translation of materials in the ethnic press,' Ms Johnson added.

Certain unethical practices in editorial and financial aspects also pervade the ethnic press. Some papers 'sell' editorial pages to community leaders, businessmen, etc. for them to promote their personal agenda through articles and columns.

A number of publications practice 'red herring' advertising where they publish ads for free. Such practice is geared to show the publications have support from the community although some of these advertisements may only promote projects or businesses of the proprietors and their friends.

Because advertising in the government sector is elusive, having pages full of ads, although non-paying ones, become the basis for ad placements from some government entities if and when they do decide to advertise in the ethnic press.

Recently, the NSW government launched its proposed amendments to the Anti-Discrimination Act, among others, making broadcasters and media liable for inciting violence and hatred. Members of the ethnic press were present at the launch along with staff from the mainstream media.

The law applies equally whether it is an ethnic press editor or the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. NSW Minister for Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Michael Photos said of the amendments.

Journalists argue that government administration has become more complex and opportunities for corruption have multiplied, making freedom of the press all the more essential.

Ted Sezi Cheeye, editor of Uganda Confidential, says: 'The power of the critical press has scared the government and consequently attracted government hostility on flimsy grounds.'

It is, however, admitted that ethics is a word still foreign to many Ugandan journalists.

Penninah Nuwagaba, a sub-editor on Business World, says the problem is in part the result of many journalists' lack of knowledge of the laws that govern the press. 'Many of us joined the profession from different professions — teachers and so on. We are the least acquainted with the laws,' she says.

Even those who are trained in the profession receive little instruction in the law. Anthony Weasa, a reporter on Business World who did a degree in mass communications at Makerere University, says he learnt little about the law. 'Maybe it is taught at the Uganda Institute of Management where journalists undertake a diploma course,' he says.

Apart from the fact that journalists are not sufficiently trained, there is little agreement among the press about basic standards. This is largely because no effective forum to discuss the issue has been found.

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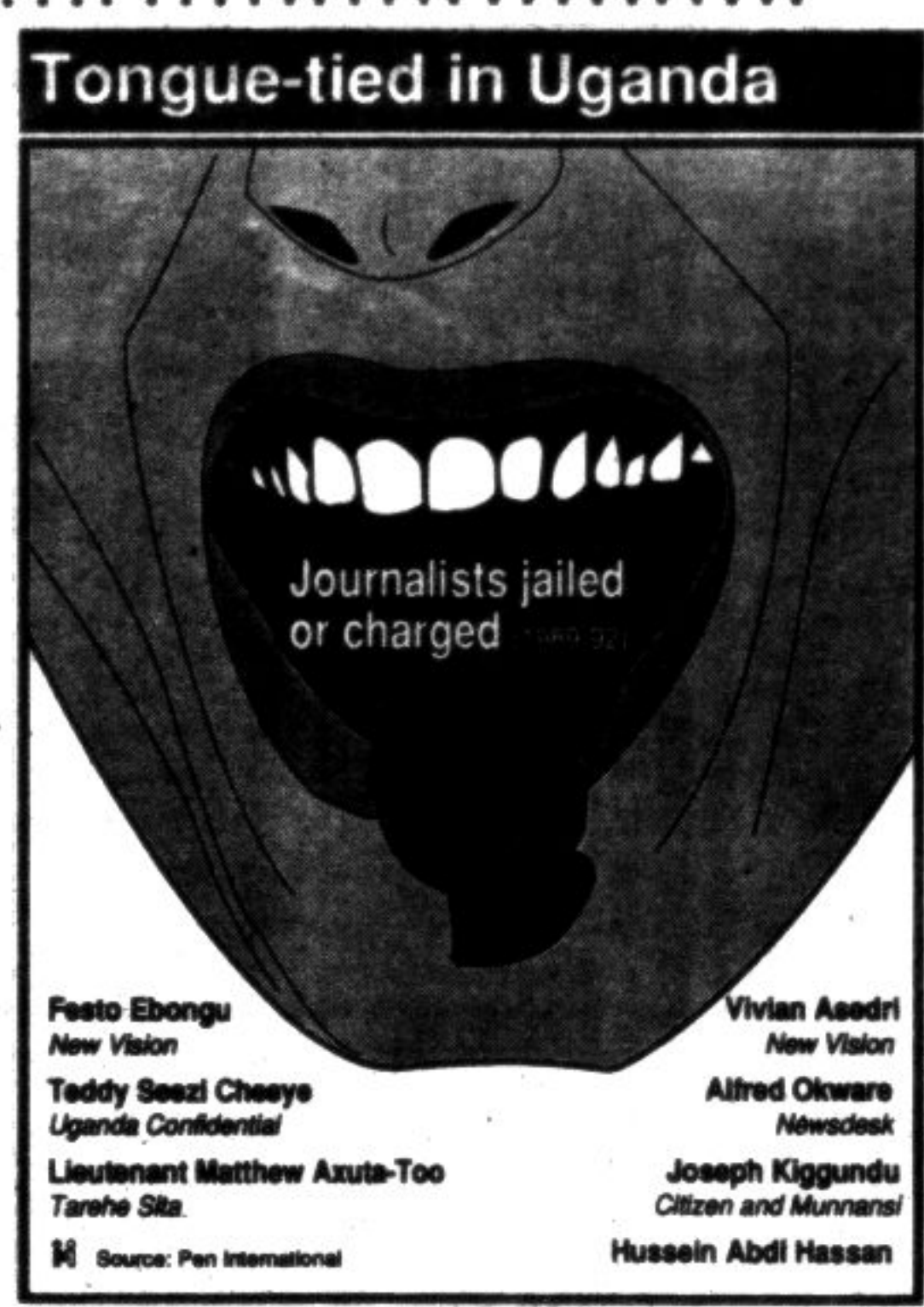
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Curbs on Press Freedom Enrage Journalists

Crespo Sebunya writes from Kampala

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When Mike Musoke, a reporter on the Ugandan newspaper the Monitor, wrote about government over-spending, citing President Yoweri Museveni's many visits from his extended family and the large delegations he takes on his world tours, he may have been oblivious to the danger involved.

But a few weeks later, when he was man-handled by a group of security men and warned not to continue writing in this way, many journalists took it as an indication of what was in store for them.

The Ugandan press has earned a reputation for being one of the freest on the continent by carrying hard-hitting stories about government misdemeanors. Popular and quality papers alike have taken on what they call a crusade against the misuse of power.

Now, however, the government is stepping up pressure on the press by banning two newspapers and threatening to withdraw government advertising, which provides papers with much-needed revenue.

The government is also planning to increase regulation of the media by introducing a Press Bill, which would establish a press council to monitor newspaper content and set conditions for the establishment of new papers, including sufficient capital and an office.

The government argues that newspapers need guidelines. Prime Minister Cosmas Adebayo says: 'I don't care what they write about me as a person, but there is classified information.'

Journalists argue that government administration has become more complex and opportunities for corruption have multiplied, making freedom of the press all the more essential.

Ted Sezi Cheeye, editor of Uganda Confidential, says: 'The power of the critical press has scared the government and consequently attracted government hostility on flimsy grounds.'

It is, however, admitted that ethics is a word still foreign to many Ugandan journalists.

Penninah Nuwagaba, a sub-editor on Business World, says the problem is in part the result of many journalists' lack of knowledge of the laws that govern the press. 'Many of us joined the profession from different professions — teachers and so on. We are the least acquainted with the laws,' she says.

Even those who are trained in the profession receive little instruction in the law. Anthony Weasa, a reporter on Business World who did a degree in mass communications at Makerere University, says he learnt little about the law. 'Maybe it is taught at the Uganda Institute of Management where journalists undertake a diploma course,' he says.

Apart from the fact that journalists are not sufficiently trained, there is little agreement among the press about basic standards. This is largely because no effective forum to discuss the issue has been found.

Journalists are supposed to register with the Uganda Journalists Association (UJA) but many do not because of the organisation's many internal problems. After failing to pay the rent on its offices in a seedy part of Kampala, the organisation was recently evicted and forced to relocate in a tiny