

Mondi Paper Newspaper Awards 2003 announces short list

Twenty-one South African journalists have been shortlisted for the third annual Mondi Paper Newspaper Awards. The group was selected by the judging panel after two days of sifting and wading through the 692 entries submitted by journalists and freelance writers from 29 different newspapers.

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After intense discussions and deliberations, the panel finally compiled the list of candidates across the seven categories of award.

Sponsored by Mondi Paper and endorsed by the Newspaper Association of South Africa (NASA), the Newspaper Awards are intent on acknowledging South African newspaper journalists who excel in their profession and who exhibit unsurpassed distinction in the various disciplines of newspaper journalism. These disciplines have been fashioned as best possible into the categories of News Writing, Feature Writing, Investigative Journalism, Creative and Opinionated Journalism, Graphical Journalism, Photograph and Presentation.

Professor Guy Berger, head of the Department of Media Studies and Journalism at Rhodes University and convenor of the judging panel, comments, "This competition is becoming recognised as the prestigious place to seek citation. The judges were heartened that so many journalists felt sufficient pride in their work consider it worthy of submission."

He adds, "On the other hand, quite a number of this year's entries still have a way to go in order for their quality to match the increase in quantity. Entrants' aspirations to be declared a winner need to be underpinned by work which will meet the standards as displayed by the best in the field."

In the News Writing category, the judges nominated four journalists namely Estelle Ellis and Jeremy Gordi of The Star for "Pressure mounts on Ngcuka's accusers", a series of stories on the Hefer Commission; Vuyisile Ngesi of Diamond Fields Advertiser for "Wheels of corruption", a series of articles exposing the corruption allegations against a Northern Cape MEC; and Clinton van der Berg of Sunday Times for "Boks trained at gunpoint", a story on Kamp Staalraad.

The shortlist for the Feature Writing category, receiving 194 entries, reads as follows: Fred Khumalo of ThisDay for "Decoding the book of Jacob", a profile on Deputy President Jacob Zuma; Lizel Steenkamp of Beeld for various entries from a feature on a post-war Baghdad to a portrait of the Melville police station; and The Star's Nalisha Kalideen for "A fall of sparrows", a three-part series on the lives of two women living in a hospice.

National weekly Mail and Guardian dominated the shortlist in the Investigative Journalism category. Wisaniwa ka Ngobeni receives two nominations, one for a collaborative piece with Matuma Letsoalo titled "Is Mabona the dirtiest politician in South Africa?" relating to stories on corruption allegations against Mpumalanga MEC Steve Mabona, and the second for "Shadow falls on Lekota", a series on Defence Minister Terror Lekota's undeclared business interests. Stefaans Brümmer and Sam Sole are nominated for an in-depth series of articles on the major SA oil purchase scandal titled "Mega oil scandal rocks SA".

In the Creative and Opinionated Journalism category, the shortlist comprises Die Burger's Willemien Brümmer with her regular column titled "Lyfskryf"; Jeremy Gordin with his entry "Spying a baffled bunch in Bloemfontein", a series on the Hefer Commission, from The Star; and Ruth Helen Walne of Daily News for "The Dying Man", a series of three articles on the death of an AIDS-sufferer and its effects on her and her parents.

Jonathan Shapiro, Zapiro cartoonist, for his series of satirical illustrations on political issues such as Ngcul Mac and Mo, Aids, Zimbabwe and Anton Vermeulen of Beeld for his entry "Geweld op kampus", an illustration on violence against women, make up the shortlist for Graphical Journalism.

The Photographic category shortlist comprises Debbie Yazbek of The Star for her portfolio titled "A fall of sparrows", Rian Horn of ThisDay for "The Hefer Commission" and Lisa Skinner of Beeld for her photograph titled "Innocent Victim".

Diamond Fields Advertiser's Johan du Plessis for "Dam of Death", Rapport's Arlene Prinsloo for her entry titled "Die groot uitskud van Afrikaner organisasies" and Beeld's Andries Gouws' "9/11 twee jaar later" constitute the shortlist in the Presentation category.

"Our eighth category, South African Story of the Year, is a special case," says Berger. "Judges found that only one particular entry deserves this award." The winner in this category will be announced at the awards ceremony on 6 May to be held at the Sandton Sun.

"The particular entries that we have singled out in our shortlist for various types of recognition reveal the kind of quality towards which the profession in general could strive. In this way, the Mondi Paper Newspaper Awards not only celebrate exemplary journalism, but also highlight levels of achievement that should serve as beacons of excellence," explains Berger.

"It was encouraging to see some of the community newspapers such as Paarl Post, Sandton Chronicle and Diamond Fields Advertiser competing this year," notes Berger. "We hope that by next year we will have more community newspapers, as well as African language newspapers, prepared to take on the national weeklies and regional dailies," Berger says.

The judging panel for this year's awards included Berger, Portia Kobue (news editor for Kaya FM), Ruth Seopedi Motau (freelance photographer), Johan de Wet (former editor of Rapport), Ken Owen (former Sunday Times editor) and Joe Thloloe (head of news at e-tv). Owing to a number of circumstances Professor Jakes Gerwel, Zubeida Jaffer and Peter Magubane were not able to take part in the judging process.

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