

Rajmohan Gandhi at National Press Club

A near-overflow crowd packed the National Press Club's First Amendment lounge June 9 to hear Rajmohan Gandhi talk about the press of India and its role in building the world's largest democracy. The event was sponsored by the NPC's International Correspondents Committee headed by Myron Belkind, onetime New Delhi bureau chief of the Associated Press. He'd met Rajmohan during the "emergency" proclaimed in the 1970s by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Rajmohan used the moment also to pay tribute to the press of Pakistan, saying it, too, does a good job. He recalled the role the newspaper he founded, "Himmat," played during the "emergency," which shackled the press with censorship. Rajmohan said Himmat challenged and defied the censorship. He recalled that he himself went to jail briefly when police surrounded and broke up a celebration of the October 2 birth anniversary of his grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi. While he was released after six hours, others were jailed longer. Today India's press is one of the world's most free.

The audience included not only journalists from many countries but also those from other international backgrounds. Belkind singled out for special recognition Ambassador Kutelia of Georgia. After the event, Rajmohan was surrounded by a large number of attendees. He said he was amazed at "all the interesting people I met!"