Neutral Citation Number: [2026] EWHC 1923 (KB)

Case No: KB-2025-001365

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

Wednesday, 29th July 2026

Before:
FORDHAM J

- -

Between:

OVIK MKTRCHYAN **Claimant**

-v-

(1) 2TROM MEDIA GROUP LTD
(2) VIKTOR TOKAREV **Defendants**

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Gervase De Wilde and **Lily Walker-Parr**
(instructed by Carter-Ruck Solicitors) for the **Claimant**
The **Defendants** did not appear and were not represented

- -

Hearing date: 23.7.26
Draft judgment: 24.7.26

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Approved Judgment

- -

FORDHAM J

This judgment was handed down on 29.7.26, by circulation to the parties and uploading to the National Archives.

FORDHAM J:

Introduction

1. This is a defamation case where the Court is deciding on appropriate remedies and dealing with consequential matters. The claim was issued on 22 April 2025 and served on 12 June 2025. On 16 February 2026 Master Davison made a judicial determination, on the Claimant's application dated 15 December 2025: (1) entering judgment in default of Acknowledgment of Service against both Defendants; and (2) directing a hearing to determine remedies, including the assessment of damages, injunctive relief and the award of costs. That hearing was before me.

Proceeding in Absence

2. At the hearing, I ruled that it was appropriate – having regard to the overriding objective – to proceed with the trial determining remedies in the absence of the Defendants (CPR 39.3). I applied the approach articulated in Sloutsker v Romanova [2015] EWHC 2503 (QB) [2015] EMLR 637 at §§25-26 and in the White Book commentary to CPR 39.3. I was satisfied on the evidence that the Defendants – a UK registered company and its UK registered director – had been served at their registered UK address (Companies Act 2006 ss.1139, 1140) with the claim documents (16 June 2026), the application for judgment in default (22 December 2025), Master Davison's judgment in default and directions (20 February 2026), the notice of the hearing (14 May 2026), the first tranche of witness statement evidence (24 June 2026), the second tranche of witness statement evidence (15 July 2026) and correspondence and a costs schedule (22 July 2026). Proper, full and fair notice had been given. The documents duly served were explicit as to the orders which this Court is being asked to make and the factual matters which are being relied on. Letters which were served identified what other documents had been supplied to the Court and offered to provide these promptly on request. The orders sought affect the exercise of freedom of expression and I was satisfied (Human Rights Act 1998 s.12(2)(a)) that the Claimant had taken all practicable steps to notify the Defendants. There has been no response, no acknowledgment, and no request. I saw no justification for adjournment. There is a safeguard of liberty to apply. CPR 39.3(3)-(5) provide as follows:

> ***Failure to attend the trial. … (3) Where a party does not attend and the court gives judgment or makes an order against him, the party who failed to attend may apply for the judgment or order to be set aside. (4) An application under paragraph (2) or paragraph (3) must be supported by evidence. (5) Where an application is made under paragraph (2) or (3) by a party who failed to attend the trial, the court may grant the application only if the applicant – (a) acted promptly when he found out that the court had exercised its power … to enter judgment or make an order against him; (b) had a good reason for not attending the trial; and (c) has a reasonable prospect of success at the trial.***

Significance of the Judgment in Default

3. The platform on which I stand in deciding remedies is the judgment in default ordered by Master Davison. That was a judicial determination, the Claimant was being given a judgment to which it appeared to the Court that he was "entitled … on his statement of case" (CPR 21.11(1)). It means liability has been decided. It is a judicial determination which enables the Court subsequently to decide to proceed by reference to the Claimant's unchallenged particulars of claim: see Brett Wilson LLP v Persons Unknown [2015] EWHC 2628 (Admin) at §§18-19. That course is plainly appropriate, in my judgment,

insofar as the statement of case pleaded matters which were necessary stepping stones to a judgment allowing the claim on liability. Even on a pleaded matter of that nature, the Court may decide to reject a pleaded contention for good reason, such as a pleaded meaning which is impossible or a pleaded defamatory tendency which is clearly wrong: Brett Wilson at §19. But there is nothing of that kind in this case. As I see it, the pleaded matters which go only to remedies are different. They are not part of the statement of case "on" which judgment on liability has been given. They remain at large. Remedies were deferred by Master Davison for a later judicial determination. In the event, nothing in the present case turns on these distinctions. I am satisfied that the factual platform on which my decisions are based have been established by the unchallenged Particulars of Claim and uncontested witness statement evidence. In approaching remedies, I have considered the factual picture up to the date of the hearing before me. I have focused on publication, impacts and implications within the UK.

The Claimant

4. The uncontested witness statement evidence of the Claimant includes the following. He is a businessman and entrepreneur. He has developed projects in the United Kingdom, Latvia, Switzerland, Belgium and Uzbekistan. Due to his professional reputation in business and successful track record of delivering projects in Uzbekistan, the Government of Uzbekistan has repeatedly and officially approved and supported his projects in that country. He is the sole shareholder of a parent company Gor Investment Ltd (GIL) and a UK-registered company Gor Logistic Ltd (GLL). He was co-founder of the Asia Alliance Bank in 2009, management of which was transferred to the Uzbek State Assets Management Agency between 2018 and 2021, with shares ownership transferred back to GIL in 2020 as part of a strategy of the Agency to reduce state participation in the banking sector. He has significant professional, corporate, property, personal and family ties to the United Kingdom.

The Article

5. The publication with which this case is concerned is an online Article published on the website The London Post on 19 October 2024 with the headline "Corruption Networks of Uzbekistan: From Washington to Tashkent". The uncontested evidence is that the First Defendant is the owner and operator of The London Post website and its affiliated social media accounts, with the Second Defendant as its sole director, with approximately 50,000 monthly visits to the website. The First Defendant and its status as a company registered in England and Wales (Company number 11673306) appear on the contact page of The London Post website. I will set out here the text of the Article. The contents which are underlined are "The Words Complained Of" in the Claimant's pleaded Particulars of Claim:

> ***Corruption Networks of Uzbekistan: From Washington to Tashkent***
>
> ***When you think about U.S. influence in Central Asia, especially in places like Uzbekistan, the image often conjured up is one of aid, partnership, and "democratic reforms." But behind the polished handshakes, diplomatic meetings, and promises of economic support, there's a darker reality at play. This reality is that American elites—and their counterparts in former Soviet republics—are manipulating every tool at their disposal to control, exploit, and profit from a region they treat like a global chessboard.***

At the centre of this intrigue is a cast of shady characters, including Ovik Mkrtchyan, a businessman with deep ties to Uzbekistan's former dictator, Islam Karimov. Mkrtchyan, alongside key player like Uktam Aripov, has created a network of financial and political schemes that not only undermines Uzbekistan's sovereignty but keeps the country firmly within the grip of foreign manipulation.

Lobbyists, Politicians, and the Dark Side of U.S. Diplomacy

What makes this even more shocking is the involvement of American lobbyists and politicians. Mkrtchyan and his partners have built connections with the U.S. political elite through firms like "Linden Strategies," managed by former White House insiders like Steve Payne. These aren't just casual meetings; this is a calculated web of influence designed to siphon money out of Uzbekistan while simultaneously propping up Western politicians.

Even more troubling, figures like former U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo are said to be tied to this scheme through Gorinvestment. The partnership between Uzbek and American elites raises serious questions about who really benefits from these so-called "development deals." Is it the Uzbek people, who still struggle with poverty and lack of basic freedoms, or the small group of elites with offshore accounts?

Uzbekistan's New Reality: The Illusion of Progress

While President Shavkat Mirziyoyev speaks of modernization and reform, the reality is that corruption remains deeply embedded in the system.

Asia Alliance Bank in Uzbekistan, despite its outwardly clean reputation, has found itself at the center of dubious events in recent years, particularly related to its privatization and suspicious internal reshuffling. In 2022, the government sold a controlling stake in the bank to British company Gor Investment Limited — a firm linked to Ovik Mkrtchyan, notorious for his involvement in international corruption schemes. This move, portrayed as part of a broader privatization program for state assets, has sparked serious concerns over the transparency of the deal. Many suspect that key assets and control were transferred to affiliated individuals before the sale, further entrenching Mkrtchyan's influence within Uzbekistan's financial sector.

While Asia Alliance Bank hasn't been directly implicated in major corruption scandals, Mkrtchyan's connection through Gor Investment raises undeniable questions. As Uzbekistan's banking sector remains mired in corruption, this bank has become part of broader schemes to siphon off capital. Embezzlement and fraud in state banks have become routine, with significant funds intended for social programs disappearing into shadowy networks, leaving little trace.

All of this only deepens the public's distrust in Uzbekistan's banking system. Government-led reforms, touted as efforts to combat corruption, serve more as a cover for those leveraging the bank to launder questionable funds and solidify their positions within the country's elite — figures like Mkrtchyan among them.

While the rhetoric from Tashkent and Washington is all about progress, democracy, and development, the reality is far more cynical. The same dirty money, the same shadowy political deals, and the same players remain firmly in control.

What Does the Future Hold?

This isn't just a story about Uzbekistan. It's a tale of how Western elites continue to exploit developing countries for their own gain. Corruption has become a tool of influence, used to manipulate governments and line the pockets of a few. Until figures like Ovik Mkrtchyan and Uktam Aripov are held accountable—and until their Western backers face the same scrutiny—countries like Uzbekistan will remain pawns in a much larger game.

As the West continues to preach democracy and development, its actions behind closed doors tell a different story: one of corruption, exploitation, and a new form of colonialism dressed up as economic aid. The question is, how long will this charade continue before the full extent of this

> ***corruption is exposed? And when will both local elites** and their Western enablers **finally be brought to justice?***

The Meaning

6. The Claimant's uncontested Particulars of Claim identify the following defamatory meaning. I find nothing in it which is extravagant or impossible (Brett Wilson at §19), and accept it for the purposes of my decisions on remedies.

> ***The Words Complained Of, in their natural and ordinary meaning and when read in the full context of the Article meant and were understood to mean that:***
>
> ***(1) The Claimant is the key player in an Uzbekistan corruption network, which embezzles state funds using offshore accounts and launders money to gain political favours; and***
>
> ***(2) The Claimant used the purchase of a controlling stake in Asia Alliance Bank in 2022 by his company, Gor Investment Ltd, as a front for him to embezzle state funds and corruptly seize control of state assets in Uzbekistan.***

Key Points About Harm and Harm-Related Conduct

7. I turn to consider the evidenced position as it stands before the Court. I will set out the key points below and label them (§§8-14 below). Some of them (namely §§8-11 below) were included within the Particulars of Claim, in pleading serious harm under s.1(1) of the Defamation Act 2013. That means they were part of the statement of case on which the Claimant has obtained judgment (see §3 above). Some of them (namely §§12(1)-(2), 13 below) were included within the Particulars of Claim, in pleading the basis for remedies. Some of the points (namely §§9(1), 9(3), 9(5), 10(5) below), are pleaded as inferences which are appropriately drawn by the Court. All of the pleaded points were supported by the Claimant's formal Statement of Truth (12 June 2025) and have been supported by subsequent witness statement evidence. Some of the points (namely §§12(3) and 14 below) were included in the witness statement evidence. All of the key points to which I refer at §§8-14 below are evidenced, in documents which have been served on the Defendants, and which stand as uncontested evidence in these proceedings. I record that the award of the arbitral tribunal in Houston (see §13(4) below) was one of the many documents adduced as an exhibit to the witness statements in these proceedings. Here are the key points about harm and harm-related conduct:

8. Imputations. (1) The imputations in the Meaning are salacious, grave and inherently likely to cause harm to both the Claimant's personal and professional reputations. (2) The Article accuses the Claimant of organised, serious and sustained criminality and corruption, involving the embezzlement of state funds and corrupt seizure of control of assets for his own financial gain.

9. Scale. (1) The Article has been published to a substantial albeit unquantifiable number of people in the UK. (2) The London Post has a substantial online following. Its Twitter/X account has 3,071 followers and its Facebook page has 18,000 followers. (3) The Defendants' Website attracts a similarly high number of regular readers. (4) The Claimant does not court media attention and, prior to the Defendants' publication of the Article, there were: very few articles about him published in England and Wales, or in English online; and no articles critical of the Claimant on any website or social media platform as prominent as those operated by the Defendants. (5) Readers in the UK would

only learn of the imputations concerning the Claimant in the Meaning of the Article from the defamatory Article.

10. Debanking. (1) Following publication of the Article, GLL and GIL were refused services from UK financial institutions in the following circumstances. (2) On 27 November 2024, Revolut Bank ("Revolut") began a compliance process in respect of GLL. The Claimant's representative responded on 6 December 2024. On 31 December 2024, Revolut requested information about the Claimant's involvement with GLL within 21 days as part of a compliance investigation, which was required to maintain access to the account. Thereafter: (a) GLL's bank account was suspended before the expiry of that period, on 6 January 2025; (b) GLL's representative provided a comprehensive account of the requested information on 13 January 2025; (c) in the second half of February 2025, Revolut informed two companies which were affiliated with GLL, and which held accounts with it, that they would be subject to an account closing procedure; and (d) GLL's representative was notified on 14 March 2025 that Revolut would no longer be offering it banking services and would be closing both GLL's account, and the personal account of a family member. (3) On 21 January 2025, UK financial provider Emerald24 refused to open an account for GIL, without giving any reasons. (4) The context and circumstances include: (i) the absence of prior media attention or interest in the Claimant; (ii) the exacerbation of any pre-existing scrutiny of, or interest in, the Claimant by the publication of the Article; (iii) the Defendants' publication of the Article on such a wide scale made it likely that it would have been available to businesses offering banking and financial services, where they conducted regulatory and compliance checks; (iv) the Claimant's very close association with both GIL and the similarly named GLL, as sole shareholder of both companies, and the direct references in the Article to both GIL and the Claimant; and (v) the coincidence in time between the Defendants' publications of the Article and the refusal of banking services. (5) GLL, GIL and the Claimant's family member were refused banking services because of harm caused to the Claimant's reputation arising from the Article.

11. Presentation and process. (1) The allegations in the Article are presented as being factual and truthful. (2) The Defendants did not request or include any comment on the part of the Claimant or any other information which might cast doubt on the claims. (3) Had the Defendants approached the Claimant for comment prior to the Article's publication, the Claimant could have corrected the position.

12. Distress and risk. (1) The Defendants' publication of the Article has caused the Claimant very significant distress. (2) The Claimant feels that his life and the lives of his family members have been endangered by the publication of the Article, which, given the extremely serious nature of the imputations it contains, is likely to prompt adverse responses to them from state and state security service actors. (3) The context for this risk includes that the Claimant was wrongly detained in Uzbekistan for three months from 17 January 2024 to 12 April 2024, before being released and cleared of all charges.

13. Campaign of disinformation.

    (1) The Defendants published the Article as part of an apparently coordinated disinformation "Campaign" carried out against the Claimant and his family members and business associates, escalating from August 2024 onwards. The Campaign has caused the Claimant very significant damage (including financial damage) and the fact that the Article plays a part in the Campaign has greatly

exacerbated his resulting distress. The Campaign initially took place from around August 2024, in the form of anonymously authored publications on Russian language websites and social media platforms, before increasing in scale and intensity during the second half of 2024.

(2) The Article was the first iteration of the Campaign to be prominently published in English. When first published, the Article was the most high-profile, and ostensibly credible, iteration of the Campaign, and includes allegations against the Claimant which have consistently been made as part of the Campaign, such as falsely associating him with Islam Karimov and/or the Karimov family.

(3) The Website of The London Post predominantly carries local news articles about events in London, the majority of which appear to be republications of council, local government, and corporate press releases. It does not appear to publish foreign news, or investigations in relation to topics similar to those purportedly addressed by the Article. The Article is distinct from the typical content of the Website, indicating that it was written and published on a different basis from the majority of the other content of the Website. The Article does not carry the byline of an identified journalist, instead being attributed only to "Ldn-Post", indicating that no individual writer or editor wished to be understood to be responsible for or associated with its content. It is written in a hyperbolic, gratuitously sensationalist, and grandiose style, inappropriate to the nature of the allegations it contains. It makes vague but extremely serious allegations of wrongdoing against the Claimant and his businesses, with a lack of precision or detail, which suggests it was written and published with no concern for the veracity of its content, or any associated legal risk. It is incoherent, and gratuitously refers to Asia Alliance Bank, a private bank in the highly-regulated Uzbek banking sector, in which the Claimant was, as at the date of publication of the Article, only a shareholder, as to which the Article contains self-contradictory statements to the effect that the bank is somehow not only "at the center of dubious events in recent years", but also that it "hasn't been directly implicated in major corruption scandals". This indicates a lack of editorial oversight or proper consideration of the allegations being advanced as part of the Article. In the circumstances, the Article was published as part of the Campaign, and not as an exercise in legitimate and responsible journalism.

(4) In respect of the Campaign, the Claimant has sought redress and has brought proceedings in multiple jurisdictions. In addition, one of the Claimant's companies (NRCO Engineering S.A.) brought arbitration proceedings in the State of Texas. On 1 May 2026 an arbitral tribunal in Houston, convened by the International Centre for Dispute Resolution, issued a final arbitration award which specifically addressed allegations made against the Claimant. The award is public and has been filed for confirmation and enforcement in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas in cause number 4:26-cv-03617. The arbitral tribunal examined in detail a letter which appears to have been one of the early iterations of the allegations against the Claimant which feature in the Campaign, and referred to corrupt conduct by the Claimant. The tribunal found that these allegations about the Claimant were entirely unsupported and not credible and that the authors "did not produce credible evidence supporting the statements" made.

14. The London Post as a news outlet:

(1) According to the Companies House webpage for the First Defendant, there is an active proposal to strike the company off the register of companies. In October 2024, the strike-off proposal was temporarily suspended. The Accounts and Confirmation Statement of the First Defendant are also listed as being overdue on its Companies House profile. The First Defendant's registered address on Companies House has changed several times in recent years, including in 2019, 2020, and 2023. The Second Defendant was terminated as a director of the First Defendant in May 2023, before being re-appointed in November 2023.

(2) Registration information for the Website is obscured by the fact that it is owned in the name of 'Domains by Proxy, LLC', a domain privacy service which holds domains on behalf of third parties to obscure their true owner. If the London Post were a legitimate news outlet, such measures would not be necessary. The Article does not carry the by-line of an identified journalist, instead being attributed only to "Ldn-Post".

(3) The London Post has purported to be regulated by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and to abide by IPSO's Editors' Code of Practice on the face of its Website. It appears from archived versions of the London Post's 'Contact Us' webpage that The London Post claimed to be regulated by IPSO until at least 1 February 2026, and purported to be regulated by IPSO at the time of publication of the Article. However, neither The London Post nor 2TROM appear in the list of approved IPSO members on IPSO's webpage.

(4) The credibility of the London Post as a legitimate news outlet has been publicly (and recently) called into question by three UK news publications, CityAM (on 21 April 2026), the Press Gazette (on 5 August 2025 and 6 January 2026) and Byline Times (on 2 February 2026). These articles show that the activities of the First Defendant and The London Post are more consistent with the production of paid disinformation or propaganda than with legitimate journalism.

(5) The first reporting in time was the 2025 Press Gazette article, which independently reported on the wider phenomenon of pseudo-journalism websites, including those operated by the Defendants. The article subsequently published in the Press Gazette on 6 January 2026 reports on the award of compensation to Mr Southall following his claim for copyright infringement in the Business and Property Courts, saying that "[a] London-based photographer has successfully sued a local news website only to find that its owners and editors are impossible to track down". It describes the content as "an eclectic mix of low quality content (apparently reproduced from press releases or rewritten from elsewhere)" which includes "links to a range of illegal gambling sites, and puff and hit pieces on influential figures from former Soviet republics". It refers to the fact that the website's output appears on Google News "meaning the search giant treats it as a bona fide publisher" and provides a recent estimate of the monthly visitors, namely that "[a]ccording to Similarweb it gets around 50,000 site visits per month".

(6) The CityAM article of 21 April 2026 is headlined "The mysterious media moguls behind London's pink slime propaganda machine" and reports that the London Post "appears to be running a "pink slime" operation" (the use of ostensibly credible local news websites to publish revenue generating content, including disinformation or propaganda). The CityAM article explains that the London Post

includes stories which are "anomalies" in relation to its local news content, such as those promoting unregulated gambling websites and "Best Ukrainian Brides". It also refers to the publication of content similar to that found in the Article, which concerns prominent or wealthy individuals in Russia or post-Soviet states. An academic quoted in the CityAM article, Dr Steven Buckley, lecturer in digital media at City University highlights the move made by 'pink slime' websites from revenue generating stories intended to raise money from advertisers to "more propagandistic" purposes.

(7) The article published by Byline Times on 2 February 2026 similarly calls the credibility of the London Post into question, stating that "the London Post resembles a local news website covering UK gambling regulations and London restaurant reviews… But sources who spoke to Byline Times described it as part of what intelligence analysts call a 'black PR' operation: coordinated disinformation campaigns designed to manipulate public opinion while concealing their true sponsors." The Byline Times article also states that: "A report earlier this year by the respected investigations website Byline Times revealed MMG, a Russian PR network, is owned by Igor Kuzin, a man with links to the Kremlin as well as a host of Russian state-owned companies. Byline Times alleges a trail of cryptocurrency payments, made by a Russian agent, linked to campaigns featured on 2Trom outlets". This article also questions whether the Second Defendant is in fact a real person, stating that: "Tokarev is a cypher: he appears on official documents and virtually nowhere else. More than one person I spoke to for this story believes he doesn't exist."

<u>My Approach to the Key Points</u>

15. I have set out above the key points which are made about harm and harm-related conduct. I have had to decide what approach to take to them, for the purposes of deciding on remedies in this case. Any approach which I take to factual matters is restricted, in two ways. First, it is limited in scope and purpose to deciding issues which have arisen between the Claimant and the Defendants. I am not making any finding or recording any observation as against, or in relation to, the position of any third party. Second, it is limited in scope and purpose to deciding on the appropriate remedies in these defamation proceedings. I am not making any finding or recording any observation in relation to any other issue. But I do need to identify the appropriate factual matrix for those two specific and limited purposes. In circumstances where relevant factual points have been raised squarely by the Claimant, as the Claimant's pleaded case and in witness statement evidence, which documents have been properly served on the Defendants and are entirely uncontested by the Defendants, I find as follows. I find the key points to be established, by the Claimant, on the balance of probabilities. I find that those key points which are inferences are proper and appropriate inferences in the light of the other evidence, and I am satisfied that I should draw them. This is the factual basis on which I am deciding remedies, as between the Claimant and the Defendants, in this case.

<u>Damages</u>

16. Damages were a pleaded remedy. There is no answer to them in this case. The Claimant is entitled to damages, approached by the Court on the following basis.

(1) General damages are recoverable for injury to reputation and consequent distress. The key factors are the gravity of the allegation, the scale of publication, the identity of the publisher and the position of the Claimant. The Claimant may in addition point to specific matters as demonstrating reputational harm, by demonstrating on the balance of probabilities that the publication complained of was a material cause of what happened. The quantification of damages is not a precise science, but the award should be such as is necessary and proportionate to the pursuit of three aims: (1) vindication of the Claimant's reputation, (2) compensation for the reputational harm sustained and (3) compensation for consequential harm to feelings. In deciding what sum is appropriate for those purposes, the Court will have regard to the level of general damages for pain, suffering and loss of amenity in cases of personal injury, and will treat the maximum award in that context as an effective cap on damages for defamation. See Blake v Fox [2025] EWCA Civ 1321 at §§24-26, 30.

(2) Aggravated damages can be appropriate if and insofar as the Court is satisfied that the injury to reputation has been aggravated by the Defendant's conduct from the time of publication, including failure to withdraw and/or failure to apologise, the effect of the conduct on the Claimant's perception of the Defendants' motivation, all insofar as the Defendants' conduct bears on the injury to the Claimant. See Gatley on Libel and Slander at §10-016 and the cases there cited.

17. The Claimant has relied on the following comparators. I can encapsulate their contours as follows:

(1) Galloway v Telegraph Group Ltd [2004] EWHC 2786 (QB) [2005] EMLR 7, upheld at [2006] EWCA Civ 17 [2006] EMLR 11, was an award of £150,000 (the equivalent is £266k now). Front page articles on two consecutive days in April 2003, in a prominent national newspaper The Daily Telegraph, accused a public figure who was a serving MP of acting in a way tantamount to treason, in secretly receiving £375k a year from Saddam Hussein, and diverting money from the oil-for-food programme, thus depriving the Iraqi people, whose interests he had claimed to represent, of food and medicines. Telegraph Group defended the claim, but did not suggest truth or even reasonable grounds for suspicion. The harm was aggravated by the absence of an apology and the conduct of the trial.

(2) Thompson v James [2013] EWHC 515 (QB) was an award of £25,000 (the equivalent is £36k now). Five postings between February and July 2011, on a blog about local planning issues, had hits at the level of 207, 132, 214, 355 and 192. The number of readers was small. The blogs accused a local government official – the local planning authority's CEO – of dishonesty and lack of integrity. They were part of an unlawful campaign by the blogger, of targeted harassment and intimidation of the CEO. The harm was aggravated by the blogger's injurious motive and her conduct of the trial.

(3) Harrath v Stand for Peace Ltd [2017] EWHC 653 (QB) was an award of £140,000 (the equivalent is £192k now). A website article, which was online between October 2014 and March 2016, accused the CEO of a TV channel called the Islam Channel of being guilty of terrorism. That was an imputation of preparedness to participate in or encourage indiscriminate murder. The case sat alongside comparative defamation damages cases involving accusations about being a

terrorist, a murderer or a paedophile. The harm was aggravated by the website operator mounting a defence of truth. The readership of the article was measured in the hundreds or low thousands.

(4) Gooderson v Qureshi [2022] EWHC 2977 (KB) was an award of £42,500 (the equivalent is £49k now). There were 21 online reviews in 13 different names on 5 different websites, posted between May 2020 and October 2020, accusing an estate and letting agent – a prominent member of the local community – of dishonesty and unscrupulous conduct including exploiting customers, failing to return deposits and imposing false charges. Several hundred people had viewed the posts. They would be found by someone looking for reviews in the very area where the estate and letting agent had successfully worked. They had an evidenced negative impact on his business. The harm was aggravated by the ignoring of reasonable requests to cease posting and remove the postings, the ongoing denial of being responsible for them, and conduct of the proceedings.

(5) Packham v Wightman [2023] EWHC 1256 (KB) [2023] EMLR 18 was an award of £90,000 (the equivalent is £96k now), of which £75k (£80k now) related to 8 articles and 2 videos which were posted online, accompanied by Tweets. They accused a BBC TV presenter and campaigner of dishonestly raising funds from the public for a tiger sanctuary by knowingly making false statements. The articles had views ranging between 66,935 and 1,464; video views of 5,953 and 2,885; and a Twitter (X) reach ranging from 27,293 to 350,888. The accusations went to the heart of the presenter's professional and personal life. They arose in the context of a campaign of harassment from others which the unsubstantiated claims would have misled and agitated. They were an attempt to seek his dismissal from the BBC. They were aggravated by use of the litigation as a continuation of an overall campaign against the presenter, false statements made and threatened within the litigation.

18. My task has been to identify the sum, in my judgment, which is necessary and proportionate in the pursuit of the three aims of vindication, reputational compensation, and compensation for harm to feelings. I have had close regard to all of the key points which I set out earlier. The gravity of the allegations is high, in alleging very serious corruption in the context of sovereign state assets. I assess the scale of publication as being within the 1,000s of reads in the UK, bearing in mind that the 50,000 of monthly visits to the Website is the Website as a whole, includes repeat-players and includes people outside the UK. There is the specific matter of the debanking, of which the Article was an effective cause, in light of what was picked up in due diligence exercises. The Claimant is not a public figure and does not have a prominent public profile. But his standing and reputation are in the area to which the Article related. Its contents went to the heart of his professional life. They would have been found by someone looking for information about him. They appeared as factual matters in a legitimate news story from a legitimate news operation. The Article arose in the context of a Campaign of disinformation, supported by evidence including a published decision of an arbitral tribunal. The harm is aggravated by the ignoring of reasonable requests to cease posting and remove the postings, and the blanket disregard of all communications sent to a registered address on a UK public register including identifying the Campaign of disinformation, leaving the Article in place from 19 October 2024 through to July 2026. All in the context of a substantiated challenge to the legitimacy of the Website as a

legitimate news operation, having falsely professed IPSO regulation, which the Defendants have not even sought to rebut. Having regard to all the features of the case, I have assessed the general and aggravated damages in the composite sum of £105,000. That remedy leaves no doubt in the mind of a reasonable onlooker as to the Claimant's entitlement to vindication. It is part of a suite of remedies which, alongside this public Judgment, serve to provide the appropriate judicial response to the harmful defamatory conduct of the Defendants in this case.

Injunction

19. Mandatory and prohibitory injunction were a pleaded remedy and there is no answer to them. The Claimant has, in my judgment, established the appropriateness of a two-pronged injunction: (a) to mandate each Defendant to cease publishing the Article; and (b) to prohibit each Defendant from publishing in future words which are the same or similar in effect to either of the two paragraphs of the Pleaded Meaning (see §6 above). So far as s.12(4) of the Human Rights Act 1998 is concerned, the Article has been found to be defamatory and constitute a civil law wrong, so that no freedom of expression or public interest can justify it and a tailored injunction is in any event justified as necessary and proportionate. A final injunction flows naturally, to vindicate the right which the Claimant has proved that he has. See ZAM v CFW [2013] EWHC 662 (QB) [2013] EMLR 565 at §§22-23. There are good grounds for apprehending that the Defendants will repeat the libel, unless restrained by the Court. The Order will need to be designed to achieve maximum clarity and with clear penal notices warning of contempt of court consequences.

Section 12 Summary

20. In the exercise of my judgment and discretion, I have concluded that an order under the power conferred on me by Parliament in s.12 of the 2013 Act is justified as appropriate. This was a pleaded remedy and no answer has been given to it. I will make directions for a Summary of the Judgment to be finalised. I will order that, from the date of its finalisation, it is to be published and fixed to the homepage of The London Post's website within 7 days, to appear there in searchable form and in the top three stories until the 3 month point, and then until the 12 month point to remain in searchable form on the Website. I have applied the principles which govern this power: see Northcott v Hundeyin [2024] EWHC 2704 (KB) [2025] EMLR 2 at §97. This is a case of a "refusal to engage at all with these proceedings": Northcott at §§98-99. The injunction requires the Defendants to take action in relation to what is on the website. So will the s.12 order. I am satisfied that there is a good prospect that the Summary will come to the attention of the original audience. I am satisfied that this statutory remedy, alongside the other remedies and this published Judgment of the Court, is necessary and proportionate to complete the necessary vindication of the Claimant's reputational rights, in light of the Defendant's prolonged and unlawful conduct. As to my duty under s.12(4) of the Human Rights Act 1998, I am satisfied that this undoubted interference with the Defendants' freedom of expression is necessary and proportionate. I am satisfied that the penal notice should apply to the s.12 order and not just to the injunction (as, I am told, happened when the s.12 order was made in Crosbie v Ley [2023] EWHC 2626 (KB)). The Defendants have the liberty to apply in accordance with CPR 39.3(3)-(5) (see §2 above).

Costs

21. I agree with the Claimant's submissions on costs, advanced by reference to the relevant provisions of the CPR and based on cogent written and oral submissions. Following a hearing which took less than one day, I am satisfied that it is appropriate summarily to assess the costs and deal with the costs of the whole claim (CPR 44.6(1)(a); CPR PD44 §9.2(b)). Costs were pleaded from the start. The statement of costs was served by process server at 2pm the day before the hearing. That was 20 hours rather than 24 hours before the time fixed for the hearing (PD44 §9.5(4)(b)). But I am quite satisfied in the circumstances including the Defendants' wholesale non-responsiveness that it is appropriate to proceed with summary assessment, without any costs reduction, in circumstances the failure is "pretty slight" and there is zero prejudice: cf. MacDonald v Taree Holdings [2021] 1 Costs LR 147 at §§21-23; White Book §44.6.5. Next, I am persuaded that costs should be on the indemnity basis. The Defendants' conduct puts this case distinctly out of the ordinary, in ways which are relevant to the basis for assessing costs. The Defendants' conduct of the case has been total non-engagement, from the initial contact using email addresses appearing on the contact us page of the Website, through the stages of formal service with documents; all in the context of an address for service on a UK register, to be used under statutory service provisions; all while leaving the Article online; and all while their ostensible online news service has continued to operate. The Claimant's costs, set out in the statement of costs, are the true costs of having to bring and pursue this case. There is no reason why the Defendants should not be required to pay them in full, and good reason why they should be. The hourly rates are above the guideline rates, but reflect the specialist nature of the claim and expertise of the lawyers. The indemnity basis is justified as appropriate. Any doubt as to whether costs have been reasonably incurred or as to whether they are reasonable in amount falls to be resolved in the Claimant's favour (CPR 44.3(3)). There is no respect where, beyond doubt, costs have been unreasonably incurred or are unreasonable in amount. The costs are and should be recoverable in their entirety. That is very much the appropriate signal for the Court to be giving in the very special circumstances of this case.

Circulation of the Draft Judgment

22. It is right that I record that this judgment was circulated as a confidential draft with a draft Order, but only to the Claimant's representatives. That was the product of necessity, not of an inequality of arms or of a litigation advantage. It was justified: in circumstances of the Defendant's complete non-responsiveness; where I had no opportunity to ensure that the nature of the process, the confidentiality and the embargo would be understood by them; where I was not prepared to release an embargoed confidential judgment and Order to a registered address for a company and its director, when I could have no confidence as to what would happen to it; and where the safeguard for non-responsive non-attending defendants is their liberty to apply to set aside my judgment or order (CCPR 39.3(3)). An alternative would have been to convene a read-out hearing, circulating the document while reading it out, and then inviting any corrections before releasing it to the National Archives, and then finalising the Order. That would have been an unjustified use of Court time, and an unwarranted increase in costs (for which in principle the Defendants would then have been liable), and all with no discernible advantage. What is appropriate is that I record what course I took, and why. And that is what I have done.

Order

23. The terms of the Order which I made were as follows. First, there was this:

> ***PENAL NOTICE. [1] IF YOU THE DEFENDANTS BREACH THE INJUNCTION AT PARAGRAPHS (2) AND (3) OF THIS ORDER, OR THE ORDER AT PARAGRAPH (4) OF THIS ORDER, YOU MAY BE HELD TO BE IN CONTEMPT OF COURT AND MAY BE IMPRISONED, FINED OR HAVE YOUR ASSETS SEIZED. ANY PERSON WHO KNOWS OF THIS INJUNCTION AND DOES ANYTHING WHICH HELPS OR PERMITS THE DEFENDANTS TO BREACH THE ORDER MAY BE HELD TO BE IN CONTEMPT OF COURT AND MAY BE IMPRISONED, FINED OR HAVE THEIR ASSETS SEIZED.***

24. Then there were these recitals:

> ***(R1) UPON the Claimant filing his Claim on 22nd April 2025 and serving the issued Claim Form and Particulars of Claim on the Defendants on 12th June 2025, with deemed service on 16th June 2025, and a certificate of service having been filed on 13th June 2025. (R2) AND UPON: neither Defendant having filed an Acknowledgement of Service or a Defence by 30th June 2025; the Claimant's application notice dated 15th December 2025 for judgment in default of Acknowledgement of Service and directions to a remedies hearing; and the Order of Master Davison dated 15th February 2026 entering judgment in default of Acknowledgement of Service and making directions. (R3) AND UPON the Claimant's N260 being served on the Defendants at 2pm on 22nd July 2026. (R4) AND UPON: hearing Counsel for the Claimant at a hearing on 23rd July 2026; the Defendants not attending or being represented at the hearing; and the Court ruling, for reasons given in open court, that it was appropriate to proceed in the Defendants' absence under CPR 39.3. (R5) AND UPON the Court giving Judgment [2026] EWHC 1923 (KB), which is available online from the National Archives.***

25. The main body of the Order then provided as follows:

> ***DAMAGES. (1) By 4pm on Thursday 13th August 2026, the Defendants shall pay the Claimant the sum of £105,000 in general and aggravated damages.***
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> ***INJUNCTION. (2) By 4pm on Thursday 13th August 2026 the Defendants shall cease (whether by themselves, their servants or agents, or howsoever otherwise) publishing or causing to be published the Article headlined "Corruption Networks of Uzbekistan: From Washington to Tashkent" attributed to "By Ldn Post", which was first published on 19th October 2024 at the following URL: https://london-post.co.uk/corruption-networks-of-uzbekistan-from-washington-to-tashkent/. (3) From 4pm on Thursday 13th August 2026 and on all dates and times thereafter the Defendants shall be prohibited (whether by themselves, their servants or agents, or howsoever otherwise) from publishing or causing to be published the following statements or similar words to the same effect: (3.1) The Claimant is the key player in an Uzbekistan corruption network, which embezzles state funds using offshore accounts and launders money to gain political favours; and/or (3.2) The Claimant used the purchase of a controlling stake in Asia Alliance Bank in 2022 by his company, Gor Investment Ltd, as a front for him to embezzle state funds and corruptly seize control of state assets in Uzbekistan.***
>
> ***S.12 OF THE DEFAMATION ACT 2013. (4) The Defendants shall publish or cause to be published a summary of the Court's Judgment ("the Summary of the Judgment"). Subject to the liberty to apply and any stay in accordance with paragraphs (8) and (9) of this Order below, the time, manner, form and place of the publication of the Summary of the Judgment shall be as follows: (4.1) The Summary of the Judgment shall be published and fixed to the homepage of The London Post's website (https://london-post.co.uk/) by 4pm on the date 7 days after the date of the Determination by Mr Justice Fordham provided for by paragraph (5.5) below ("the Date of Determination"). (4.2) The Summary of the Judgment shall appear in the top three stories on the homepage of The London Post's website (https://london-post.co.uk/) and be searchable throughout the period (a) from 4pm on the date 7 days after the Date of Determination (b) until 4pm on the date 3 calendar months after the Date of Determination. (4.3) The Summary of the Judgment shall appear and remain searchable on The London Post's website (https://london-***

post.co.uk/) throughout the period (a) from 4pm on the date 3 calendar months after the Date of Determination (b) until the date 12 calendar months after the Date of Determination. (5) As to the wording of the Summary of the Judgment: (5.1) By 4pm on Thursday 13th August 2026, the Claimant shall serve on the Defendants a proposed draft order setting out his proposals for the terms of the Summary of the Judgment and any proposed order including as to the costs of preparation of the Summary of the Judgment, together with a costs schedule for any summary assessment of those costs. (5.2) Each of the Defendants shall have until 4pm on Thursday 27th August 2026, to serve on the Claimant any consent or objection, together with any representations and any counter proposals, as to the terms of the Summary of the Judgment and proposed order. (5.3) The Claimant shall, by 4pm on Thursday 3rd September 2026 file and serve: (a) the Claimant's finalised proposals for the terms of the Summary of the Judgment, finalised proposed draft order and finalised costs schedule; (b) any documents received from the Defendants pursuant to paragraph (5.2) above. (5.4) Fordham J will thereafter consider on the papers whether, in the circumstances, any further procedural step is appropriate, in which case further directions will be made. (5.5) Fordham J will make a Determination as to the appropriate Order and terms of the Summary of the Judgment, in accordance with the provisions of s.12 of the Defamation Act 2013 and the documents filed pursuant to paragraph (5.3) above. The Determination will be embodied in an Order of the Court bearing the Date of the Determination.

COSTS. (6) By 4pm on Thursday 13th August 2026, the Defendants shall pay the Claimant's costs of the claim, assessed summarily on the indemnity basis in the sum of £117,663.38.

PAYMENT. (7) The payments referred to in paragraphs (1) and (6) above shall be paid to the Claimant's solicitors.

THE RIGHT TO APPLY FOR SET ASIDE. (8) Pursuant to CPR 39.3(3)-(5) and in accordance with the terms of those rules, the Defendants and each of them may apply in writing on notice to the Claimant to set aside any of the terms of this Order and/or the Court's Judgment. (9) An application pursuant to paragraph (8) may include an urgent application for a stay, to suspend the effect of any of the terms of this Order. Unless stayed by Order of this Court, the terms of this Order will take effect notwithstanding any application pursuant to paragraph (8), and the Penal Notice will remain applicable.

SERVICE OF THIS ORDER. (10). The Claimant's solicitors shall by 4pm on Tuesday 4th August 2026 serve this Order on the Defendants at their Companies House registered address.