

# MALAYSIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

A SNAPSHOT OF 2020

#### IN CONJUNCTION WITH

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY
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MEDIA REPORT CARD 2020

#### INTRODUCTION

Today, 3 May 2021, marks World Press Freedom Day. From the time of its origin in a UNESCO conference in Windhoek, Namibia in 1991, World Press Freedom Day commemorates annually the fundamental principles of press freedom: to evaluate press freedom around the world; to defend the media from attacks on their independence; and to pay tribute to journalists who have sacrificed their lives in the exercise of their profession.

This year's theme "Information as a Public Good" aims to explore what can be done in the production, distribution and reception of content to strengthen journalism, and to advance transparency and empowerment while leaving no one behind. It recognizes the changing communications system that is impacting on our health, human rights, democracies, and sustainable development.

The emergence and spread of COVID-19 have created a huge impact on the world and our lives, as we mitigate through social and physical distancing and try to contain public alarm. Given the high volume of research and information flow on COVID-19, media industries and communications channels have become more critical than ever in promoting adaptive responses that foster appropriate approaches to health and hygiene practices and adherence to preventive and mitigating measures.

It should be noted that the scope of media coverage also sets the agenda for public discourse and support towards policy measures undertaken by the government. In this situation, it is more critical that we have access to news and information that we trust and can help in understanding the crisis and what is required to protect ourselves, as well as independent information on how our government is responding to the pandemic.

Malaysia has experienced unprecedented political turmoil since the Perikatan Nasional coalition took power in March 2020. Malaysia is also currently under a State of Emergency, which was proclaimed on 11 January 2021. Since then, journalists and media organisations have found themselves under heightened scrutiny as more among them end up being investigated by the police, and even charged with criminal offences because of their reporting.

Last year, <u>Malaysiakini was charged for contempt of court</u> over readers' comments on its article about Malaysian courts reopening after the COVID-19 lockdown. Malaysiakini editor Steven Gan was also charged for contempt of court over the same issue. In July last year, <u>Al Jazeera and its journalists were investigated by Malaysian police</u> over a segment of its <u>101 East programme</u>, reporting about a wave of arrests of migrant workers in the course of efforts to combat the pandemic. Al Jazeera's Australian journalists Drew Ambrose and Jenni Henderson had their work visa renewal applications rejected. A Bangladesh national who went on record in the documentary was also deported.

To make matters worse, the pandemic has also exacerbated the already limited access to state information – the number of authorised media outlets and journalists allowed to participate in Government press conferences have since been severely restricted.

On 12 March 2021, the Malaysian government issued an <u>emergency ordinance</u> that allows governmental authorities, judicial authorities and police to demand the withdrawal of any information about the state of emergency or Covid-19 that they arbitrarily consider to be "wholly or partly false." The publication of such information with "intent to cause, or which is likely to cause fear or alarm to the public, or any section of the public" is punishable by three years in prison and a fine of RM300,000.

All these issues have resulted in <u>Malaysia's deterioration in the Reporters Without Borders</u> (RSF) annual press freedom index. Malaysia's press freedom index is now down 18 places at 119 (out of 180 countries ranked). For context, Malaysia's best ranking was just one year ago in 2020 (101st place). The drop in the rating signifies that the current government may have been successful in their intimidation and fear tactics that are now possibly contributing to an environment where media is more suppressed and less inclined to be overly critical and expected to toe the line when it comes to reporting.

Conclusively, the media in Malaysia appears to be facing multiple threats, including challenges to its sustainability and economic viability, government restrictions and lack of transparency in providing information, and the lack of strong media and information literacy capacities among the public. The last one is particularly important as people empowered with media and information literacy abilities are able to recognise, value, and demand good journalism and access to information as an integral part of a democratic society.

FREEDOM DAY 2021

#### 1. ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF NEWS MEDIA

Malaysian media, especially traditional print media, had already been facing financial difficulties before the Covid-19 pandemic. Migration of readers to free-to-view digital online news led to dwindling income from news subscriptions both print and digital, while a reallocation of spending by advertisers contributed to a deficit in advertising revenues. These are among the key factors that have led to drastic drops in income for media companies.

The severity of these difficulties was made further visible when the pandemic broke out in Malaysia. In the period of slightly over one year, a worrying trend of major downsizing took hold of the Malaysian media industry. Many newspapers and other publications had to close down or reduce the number of times they publish amid the pandemic.

21 April 2020: <u>The Edge Financial Daily</u> printed its last issue, citing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to digital news as why it is unable to survive. The Edge weekly newspaper is still being published.

29 April 2020: Oriental Daily announced that it would only be printing on weekdays from 1 May 2020 onwards (instead of daily) and reducing its newsstand price from RM1.20 to RM0.60 per copy;

30 April 2020: <u>BluInc Media Sdn Bhd</u>, well known for its magazines such as Cleo, Jelita, Marie Claire and HerWorld, ceased operations due to challenges arising from the digital disruption and exacerbated by COVID-19;

30 April 2020: <u>Sin Chew Daily</u> printed its last night edition copies "due to various challenges". It is still publishing its ePaper edition.

30 April 2020: China Press temporarily halted the print version of its evening edition during the movement control order (MCO) period, to return once the MCO is over, and;

End-June 2020: AskLegal, a law-based website written for the Malaysian layman, launched a crowdfunding campaign as a last resort to stay afloat after the MCO affected business.

June 2020: news of a <u>second retrenchment affecting some 300 Media Prima</u> staff members was reported by the media. This comes after the 16 December 2019 confirmation that media conglomerate Media Prima Berhad undertook a "manpower rationalisation" exercise, affecting staff from the New Straits Times (NST), Berita Harian (BH) and Harian Metro. At the initial stage 543 staff from NST were affected.

Despite these closures, some new media outlets also popped up during the pandemic.

End-2019: <u>Travel Industry Network Media (TIN Media)</u> delivers news on the developments in the travel, tourism and hospitality industries in the country and around the world to aid travel industry professionals in their businesses.

June 2020: Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) launched the <u>"Saluran Berita RTM"</u>, with the theme 'Yang Sahih di Berita RTM'. The 24-hour channel focuses on news and news programmes in Malay, English, Mandarin and Tamil and was launched as part of the government's approach in countering fake news.

July 2020: <u>Dagang News</u>, a bilingual news portal dedicated to covering business and corporate news stories, with a focus on the impacts on businesses and the economy as a result of government and political policies surrounding Malaysia and Indonesia.

July 2020: <u>Utusan Malaysia</u> reopened under a new publisher, Media Mulia Sdn. Bhd, following the initial shutdown of one of Malaysia's oldest papers, in October 2019, which also included its sister publication Kosmo! as well as Mingguan Malaysia and Kosmo! Ahad!. Nonetheless, 200 former staff of Utusan have since hauled their ex-employer to court over alleged unpaid termination benefits;

September 2020: The Vibes began operations online, with coverage on political issues, business updates, world news, sports and fitness, culture and lifestyle.

September 2020: <u>Malaysia Now</u>, a bilingual current affairs website providing coverage on topics ranging from politics, current issues, business and lifestyle around the world.

Journalists have also been severely impacted by the closure or downsizing of many media companies. National Union of Journalists Malaysia (NUJ) general-secretary Chin Sung Chew said in April 2021 that a total of 400 journalists had lost their jobs in the past two years. A spate of retrenchments since March 2020, when the first Movement Control Order (MCO) was announced, also resulted in NUJ's membership shrinking from about 1,000 to only about 500 as of last month. NUJ members are from eight mainstream Malaysian newspapers, namely the New Straits Times, Berita Harian, Harian Metro, The Star, Nanyang Daily, Sin Chew Daily, Kwong Wah Yit Poh and The Sun.

Last month, NUJ launched its <u>Re-Skilling Fund</u> to help equip retrenched journalists with digital skills and increase their employability in the new media scene. NUJ aims to raise RM100,000 through the fund, which will be used to cushion the cost of a series of training workshops in collaboration with selected partners, for journalists who had lost their jobs due to cost-cutting exercises or voluntary separation schemes (VSS).

#### THE WAY FORWARD

It is fundamental that media freedom and freedom of expression as enshrined in our Federal Constitution and other international human rights standards are upheld by the government. This includes promoting informed debates as fundamental to informed decision-making, and, as such, the critical role of media and their views must not be censored or criminalised – especially in times like this, and with a new government in power.

What is clear is that the media can no longer rely on traditional means of revenue and business models. It is also key that the industry rethink and re-envision a new business model to ensure the sustainability of media outlets affected by the current trend in their revenue deficit. Not doing so risks seeing media freedom being impacted in the event that alternative sources of news also be forced to close down, thus resulting in further cutbacks and retrenchment of its staff.

In the interim, certain financial assistance, such as tax incentives, short-term loans or government advertising, among others, could be considered to enable media outlets to stay afloat during this crisis. Notwithstanding, these should be short-term to ensure it does not damage the credibility or independence of the media, or become tools for the government to exert greater control over the media towards propaganda and censorship.

Another move to consider, as initiated in a number of countries as well as by the Malaysian Newspaper Publishers Association, is to find ways and means of getting multinational technology corporations such as Google and Facebook to share advertising revenue generated through content from local media outlets.

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## 2. GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWNS AND RESTRICTIONS IN PROVIDING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Malaysia's existing legislative framework, even before the pandemic, was designed to severely limit the access to a wide array of information on national administration. Repressive laws such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA), the Official Secrets Act (OSA), the Sedition Act and the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) continue to be utilised, at times arbitrarily, to stifle media freedom.

Malaysia has yet to have a specific federal-level law on Right to Information: only Selangor and Penang have Freedom of Information (FOI) Enactments which seek to recognise and uphold people's right to state-held information, despite the limitations. Creating an enabling environment that upholds and promotes the right of public and individuals to access their right to information enables constructive participation in any debate or discussion related to specific decision-making process and/or of public interest, such as measures taken in the process of managing the pandemic.

Media freedom in Malaysia, historically, has been largely restricted by partisan politics and repressive laws and actions by the government of the day that undermined media independence and freedom of expression and speech. Increasingly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government's attempts at silencing dissenting voices and undermining media freedom is signaling the downwards spiral of Malaysia into an inconceivable authoritarian and undemocratic regime.

Various repressive and archaic laws were used against the media and journalists last year. These laws include Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia (CMA) Act 1998, the Sedition Act 1948, Section 504 of the Penal Code, Section 505 of the Penal Code and the Printing Presses and Publications (PPPA) Act 1984. Other laws include Section 203A of the Penal Code and Section 114A of the Evidence Act 1950.

State officials regularly invoked the COVID-19 pandemic to justify crackdowns on free speech and movement. Independent news outlets were often excluded from official government briefings, parliamentary sessions, and other events of public interest, purportedly in order to adhere to standard operating procedures and social distancing measures. Access to certain press conferences by ministers providing COVID-19 related updates was limited to just a few "official media". On 7 April 2020, the Prime Minister's Department issued an official media invitation to a press conference following the special ministerial meeting on the implementation of the MCO, but limited access to live coverage only to Bernama and RTM. This trend of restricting and allowing access to only government media agencies creates a situation that only one-sided news or perception will be available for the public's consumption.

Court reporters were also restricted from covering court proceedings due to stricter measures under the MCO; only videographers and cameramen were allowed inside court premises.

Instead, reporters were initially forced to wait outside the premises and get their information and a copy of the charge sheet from the lawyers representing the accused, and if they are lucky, the deputy public prosecutor (DPP). If not having direct access to information continues to become a norm, journalists risk misquoting or are not able to present neutral and reliable information.

Media's access to Parliament sitting were also restricted. During the 18 May 2020 one-day Parliament sitting, media access was restricted to only State-owned media RTM and Bernama. Reporters from other organisations could only watch the proceedings live. This also included the state assembly sitting as on 11 May 2020 and 12 May 2020, respectively, only "official media" were allowed to cover the Melaka and Perak state assembly sittings. Further, on 16 October 2020, Parliament decided to restrict the media's coverage of the upcoming proceedings of both houses to 15 media agencies.

According to a statement from Parliament's corporate communications unit, in-house media coverage for the Third Meeting of the Third Term of the 14th Parliament session will be limited to: Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), Bernama, TV Al-Hijrah, TV3, New Straits Times, Berita Harian, Astro Awani, Utusan Malaysia, Sinar Harian, The Star, The Sun, Sin Chew Daily, Nanyang Siang Pau, Malaysia Nanban and Channel News Asia. The decision was attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and said to be in accordance with standard operating procedures (SOP) set by the National Security Council and the Health Ministry. Quite notably, the list excludes online all news portals which operate exclusively online, almost all international news agencies and radios.

Last year saw several journalists and media agencies investigated, harassed and subjected to legal action by the State for their critical reporting, dissenting views or platform. The change of government at the federal level last year also contributed to the "new normal" for journalists and media outlets, with a number of reporters being called in by the police for questioning or being charged over reports they authored:

Malaysiakini and its Editor-in-Chief, Steven Gan: On 15 June 2020 the Attorney General filed an ex-parte application at the Federal Court to initiate contempt of court proceedings against Malaysiakini and its Editor-in-Chief, Steven Gan, over third-party comments by its readers on an article relating to the judiciary.

<u>South China Morning Post former correspondent, Tashny Sukumaran</u>: On 6 May 2020, Tashny was summoned to Bukit Aman for questioning over an article she wrote on the May Day raids on migrants in Kuala Lumpur by Immigration Department officials. The police have since classified her investigation as No Further Action;

<u>Former radio deejay and television personality, Patrick Teoh</u>: On 9 May 2020, Patrick was investigated for allegedly insulting Johor Crown Prince Tunku Ismail Sultan Ibrahim on Facebook. An investigation was opened under Section 233(1)(a) of the CMA and on 15 June, Patrick was charged at the Johor Bahru Sessions Court.

<u>CodeBlue Editor-in-Chief, Boo Su-Lyn</u>: On 26 June 2020, Su-Lyn was called by the police to give a statement in response to four articles reporting the declassified findings of an independent inquiry committee formed to investigate the 2016 fire at Hospital Sultanah Aminah in Johor, initially reported as being probed under the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and the Penal Code. The police later said that Su-Lyn was being probed under Section 203A of the Penal Code, and not the OSA;

Al Jazeera: On 10 July 2020, police questioned six Al Jazeera journalists involved in the production of a documentary, "Locked Up In Malaysia's Lockdown" that alleged ill-treatment of migrant workers and refugees during the partial lockdown initiated by the government to combat COVID-19. Authorities also raided Al Jazeera's office and premises of two other media outlets, ASTRO and UnifiTV, for reportedly featuring the documentary. An application to renew the work visas of Al Jazeera's two Australian journalists, who were involved in producing the documentary, was also rejected.

This list does not include the numerous instances of online harassment by ministers against journalists who allegedly misreported the news. Read together, these can be seen as a deliberate and concerted series of actions intended to stifle media freedom. Threats such as this could lead to misguided and disproportionate actions being taken against media institutions and reporters, which not only would be counter-productive in shutting down flow of information and related public discourse that is crucial in dealing with public health issues, but also inadvertently lead to the media self-censoring and toeing the government's line so as to retain its license and its market. This is deeply troubling because the public has a right to know what transpired and be able to form their own opinion based on multiple sources of information, and any censorship and control of media platforms by the government will create an information vacuum.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

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It is fundamental that media freedom and freedom of expression as enshrined in our Federal Constitution and other international human rights standards are upheld by the current government. This includes promoting informed debates as fundamental to informed decision-making, and, as such, critical views must not be censored or criminalised – especially in times like this, and with a new government in power. The government of the day should also move towards enacting a right to information law and repealing or amending repressive laws such as the PPPA, the OSA, the Sedition Act and amending Section 233 of the CMA so that these laws are not utilised arbitrarily to stifle all manner of speech.

The government should also scrap the ordinance it introduced on creating, publishing or circulating "fake news" related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Emergency. Instead, it could

consider a new piece of legislation that specifically addresses the issue of false information online, with clear and specific objectives to avoid indirect censorship from authorities.

Any measures taken to tackle COVID-19 and has the potential to restrict media freedom must be legal, necessary, proportionate and temporary with the aim of mitigating the immediate public health crisis. The government must work with the media in ensuring fair and equal access to all media outlets and platforms to all timely information related to the crisis. Journalists and news portals must be allowed the space to scrutinise and be critical, if necessary, of the government's position or action.



### 3. COMBATTING MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION BY DEVELOPING MEDIA AND INFORMATION LITERACY CAPACITIES

According to the <u>2020 ICT Use and Access by Individuals and Households Survey</u> by the Department of Statistics, 90% of Internet users in Malaysia said their main reason to get online was so they could participate in social networks. However, during the pandemic, the department discovered an increase in Internet usage among Malaysians for online services related to learning activities, public health, government, digital commerce, and entertainment.

In particular, 61.9% of Malaysians aged 15 and above had used the Internet to seek health related information or services in 2020, compared to 45.2% in 2019. The number of people seeking state-held information had also increased from 45.5% in 2019 to 52.9% in 2020. This data was obtained by the number of people logging on to the e-Government online platform, which was set up for the public to obtain information held by the State.

It is unsurprising that more people are turning to online sources for their information and news, since social media has the ability to enable social connections, regardless of distance. However, this also leads to risks such as misinformation and disinformation, particularly in the time of a pandemic. Malaysian media is inundated with the polarisation of perspectives, the politicisation of vital information, partisan propaganda and disinformation. This is a serious threat to credible and reliable information on the pandemic in that it has serious consequences on the lives of public and related social and economic impacts.

At this stage, the media's role in combating misinformation has never been more critical. The massive "infodemic" brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic is potentially a deadly explosion of misinformation, not just in Malaysia, but also globally. By large, it is encouraging that key media outlets have published practical information and services available for vulnerable and marginalised groups, including COVID-19 tracking platforms, essential telephone numbers for healthcare and shelter services and hygiene practices in multiple languages and using infographics. In a teleconference session for the media held by the Health Ministry in February 2021, the ministry's director-general Tan Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah said media practitioners are the "vaccine" needed to combat misinformation and disinformation related to Covid-19.

The Government has also made periodical reminders for the public not to share unverified information, with catchy slogans such as "tak pasti, jangan kongsi" ("not sure, don't share") and "pastikan sahih" ("ensure its verified"). However, these are only the bare minimum as they do not do much to improve media and digital literacies among the public. Even the government's fact-checking efforts by way of the <a href="Sebenarnya.my">Sebenarnya.my</a> portal and the <a href="Quick Response Team">Quick Response Team</a> to verify any viral news and debunk false information, are more reactive than preventive in the fight against misinformation.

Perhaps the root of the whole problem is the lack of effort to equip the public with the media and digital literacy skills required to filter information on the internet. These literacy skills refer to basic practices such as cross-referencing sources of information to check its veracity, reverse image-searching photos to see if they have appeared elsewhere in a different context, or spotting tell-tale cues in photos and/or videos that could help identify when and where they were made.

Media and digital literacy skills would empower people to be better at spotting false information, thus reducing the number of times this false news is forwarded to a larger audience. Without these skills to help inculcate the habit of fact-checking information, society is vulnerable to being misled about the dangers of the virus.

Most disconcerting is the fact, well-entrenched even before the COVID-19 pandemic, of the dangerous consequences of the disinformation crisis, which is the potential of having the public downgrading their trust in all information from their regular media because it is becoming more difficult to discern facts from falsehood, legitimate findings from fraudulent ones, and overly partisan content from critical independent journalism.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

Digital literacy is one of the most important aspects for Malaysians, in order to enable them to distinguish false from real news. Citizens need to learn how to evaluate news sources — not merely accepting at face value everything they read. They also need to be made aware that their inability to identify false news and then blindly spreading the information could further intensify the problem.

Despite the existence of fact-checking avenues like Sebenarnya.my and the Quick Response Team, the issues covered and the perceived trustworthiness of the sources are restricted, due to the sources' proximity to the authorities. Therefore, a more robust system of fact-checkers should be considered, which expands the pool from only government sources to other institutions such as NGOs.

It is also crucial to work on building and sustaining the integrity of the local and national media providers to gain the trust of the citizens. As the scope of media coverage sets the agenda for public discourse, there is a high expectation that the media would be reliable, avoid partisan narrative, be fact-based, responsible, balanced and ethical in their reporting. It is essential to reinforce the role of verification through multi-sourcing, independent fact-checking and digital media literacy for all journalists.

The media has a key role to play in refraining from and preventing the perpetuation of misinformation and disinformation by strengthening independent fact-checking and channeling fact-based news in a timely and analytical manner, including updates by public

authorities during this public health crisis. This is critical in countering any myths or misleading facts on the spread of the virus or on related state measures.

Reporters, editors and publishers must collectively be responsible and aware of the growing sophistication of disinformation tactics, including fraudulent sources, faux experts, inauthentic social media accounts, corrupted datasets and fake publications that aims to promote certain rhetoric, political agenda or propaganda.

Quality journalism is vital, and focusing on public service and social responsibility is fundamental for the media outlets in surviving these turbulent moments. In a time of massive misinformation and disinformation, media entities must consider collaborative measures, including with civil society experts, on independent fact-checking initiatives. Investing adequate resources and learning from the good practices across the regions will be useful, including on how the public can access or even participate in this initiative.

As we move towards envisioning a future of strengthened and independent media we must also focus on the need for a transparent and independent self-regulatory body such as the proposed Media Council. The Media Council, in providing an avenue for arbitration of public complaints, would be instrumental in building confidence in the media and contribute to the credibility of news media organizations by upholding international standards.

PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2021

#### 4. MEDIA REPORT CARD 2020

#### Coverage that was unfavourable towards LGBTQI+ communities

Media coverage on Malaysian cosmetics entrepreneur Nur Sajat is arguably the most well-known negative public portrayal of LGBTQI+ communities in Malaysia in 2020. In the media, Nur Sajat was regularly deadnamed by both interview sources and journalists/editors who insisted on referring to her by her "legal name" or "birth name". Deadnaming occurs when someone, intentionally or not, refers to a transgender person by the name they used before they transitioned. Here are some samples of media coverage where Nur Sajat was deadnamed:

6 February 2020: The Malaysian Reserve / Bernama

13 March 2020: Astro Awani

31 December 2020: Malaysia Gazette

Other forms of media coverage that were unfavourable towards LGBTQI+ communities are as follows:

26 April: A <u>Bernama</u> article headlined "Pondan, 14 lelaki ditahan ingkar PKP" reported on the arrest of a transgender and 14 men for breaching the Movement Control Order (MCO). While the facts of the article were presented in a straightforward manner, the media report used the derogatory term "pondan" in reference to the transgender person arrested.

27 July: <u>Berita Harian</u> reported on actor Ruhainies, whose gift of a cake by an ardent fan went viral as it was allegedly designed to look like a famous transgender woman from Thailand. The report repeatedly used the inappropriate terms "wanita jadian" and "mak nyah" in reference to transgender women.

28 October: <u>Harian Metro</u> uploaded an article with video, on a raid conducted on a birthday celebration by religious authorities in Kedah. Thirty of the guests were identified as transgender women and served notices to appear at the religious authorities' office on a fixed date. The article opens by saying "lagak mereka seperti wanita, namun hakikatnya mereka adalah lelaki" (they act like women, but the fact is they are men). The article and the video that accompanied it also consistently referred to transgenders by the derogatory term "pondan". The transgender women's faces were pixelated; however, specific mention was made on their feminine outfits. By refusing to acknowledge their chosen gender and repeatedly referring to them as "men", the report reinforces the dehumanisation of transgenders.

#### Coverage that fanned racism and xenophobia against migrants and refugees

The onset of COVID-19 and its resulting lockdown had a particularly harsh impact on refugees and migrants in Malaysia. There has been a wave of racist and xenophobic sentiments toward refugees and migrants, with the Rohingya bearing the brunt of the blowback. Such reactions have taken shape against the backdrop of a "Malaysians first" mentality, given the ripple effects of the pandemic and the lockdowns on the locals. Media coverage of migrant workers in 2020 has been rather appalling, with stereotypical views that served to further fan the flames of discontent and trust deficit among Malaysians.

Here are some examples of media coverage that painted refugees and migrants in a negative light:

13 June: A <u>Berita Harian</u> report headlined "Pasar Borong KL kini selesa, selamat kepada pelanggan, bersih daripada warga asing" observed "positive changes" in the environment at a wholesale wet market in KL after authorities "rounded up" the foreign workers there. Much of the language used in the report alluded to the stereotypes Malaysians hold about migrants, including that they were "unclean", and were prone to "being loud and getting into fights". The journalist had also interviewed locals who claimed they felt safer without the presence of foreign nationals in the wet market, thus further dehumanising the migrants.

29 June: <u>Bernama</u> reported on Rohingya refugees who had attempted to enter Malaysia via Langkawi by boat. From the start, the narrative is set as hostile, with the opening statement being "datang tanpa diundang" (showing up uninvited). The report refers to the Rohingya refugees as "pendatang tanpa izin (illegal immigrants). Worse, the report claimed the refugees were "seeking sympathy" by showing that they were 'daif' (impoverished) and "intentionally damaging" their boat's engine to "avoid being chased away". The report includes the journalist's observations — the boat is described as "kotor" (filthy) and "busuk dengan campuran bau minyak diesel" (filled with the stench of diesel). Upon seeing "nasi yang sudah berulat" (stale rice) inside the boat, the journalist also assumed "mungkin tidak sempat dijamah apabila mereka ditahan" (perhaps [the refugees] couldn't eat in time before they were detained).

28 May: Malaysia Gazette published its journalist's observations of migrant workers at the Selayang wet market in KL soon after the first Movement Control Order was lifted. On top of the observation that there were many foreign workers out and about, especially from Myanmar, the journalist said many of them "lari bertempiaran" (scrambled and ran) upon seeing the Malaysia Gazette photographer take pictures, allegedly fearing that the photographer might be an enforcement officer. Sources quoted in the story also claimed the

foreign workers were not adhering to social distancing measures, and they "gemar meludah merata-rata" (liked to spit everywhere). Again, these reinforces the negative stereotypes about migrants' cleanliness, while this observation of foreign workers' adherence to SOPs as opposed to locals puts the marginalised group under harsher scrutiny than they deserve.

