

# 2020 Annual Report

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The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is a feminist, freedom of expression watchdog and non-profit organisation that aspires for a society that is democratic, just and free, where all peoples will enjoy free media and the freedom to express, seek and impart information.

**CENTRE FOR**

**INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM**

Advocating Media Freedom and Access to Information


**Centre for Independent Journalism**

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## GLOSSARY

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>APrIGF</b> | Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum   |
| <b>BHEUU</b>  | <i>Bahagian Hal Ehwal Undang-Undang di Jabatan Perdana Menteri</i> , or Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department |
| <b>CIJ</b>    | Centre for Independent Journalism   |
| <b>CMA</b>    | Communications and Multimedia Act 1998  |
| <b>CMP</b>    | Community media project   |
| <b>CSO</b>    | Civil Society Organisation  |
| <b>EGM</b>    | Expert Group Meeting  |
| <b>FCCM</b>   | Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia   |
| <b>FGD</b>    | Focus Group Discussion  |
| <b>FOE</b>    | Freedom of expression   |
| <b>GE14</b>   | 14th General Elections of Malaysia  |
| <b>GERAMM</b> | Gerakan Media Merdeka   |
| <b>HRD</b>    | Human rights defender   |
| <b>IDUAI</b>  | International Day for Universal Access to Information   |
| <b>IGF</b>    | Internet Governance Forum   |
| <b>IOJ</b>    | Institute of Journalists Malaysia   |
| <b>JCI</b>    | Jeffrey Cheah Institute on Southeast Asia   |
| <b>LDF</b>    | Legal Defence Fund  |
| <b>MMC</b>    | Malaysian Media Council   |
| <b>MP</b>     | Member of Parliament  |
| <b>NGO</b>    | Non-governmental organisation   |
| <b>OGBV</b>   | Online gender-based violence  |
| <b>OSA</b>    | Official Secrets Act 1972   |
| <b>PH</b>     | Pakatan Harapan   |
| <b>PN</b>     | Perikatan Nasional  |
| <b>PPPA</b>   | Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984  |
| <b>RTI</b>    | Right to Information  |
| <b>SOP</b>    | Standard Operating Procedures   |
| <b>SUARAM</b> | Suara Rakyat Malaysia   |
| <b>UDHR</b>   | Universal Declaration of Human Rights   |
| <b>UNESCO</b> | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation  |
| <b>USM</b>    | Universiti Sains Malaysia   |
| <b>UUM</b>    | Universiti Utara Malaysia   |
| <b>WPFD</b>   | World Press Freedom Day   |



# MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## WATHSHLAH G. NAIDU

The year 2020, which started with much hope and promising plans for growth and reform, turned into a year like none other on so many levels.

At a time where both globally and locally we were starting to deal with the advent of COVID-19, we were hit with the unprecedented political turmoil initiated through the machinations of select politicians leading towards the formation of a new Perikatan Nasional (PN) government. The situation was further exacerbated with the announcement of lockdown and travel restrictions in March.

These incidents signified the start of a pattern of silencing critical and dissenting voices or restrictions placed on various forms of expressions:

- Journalists and media organisations were not spared, and often found themselves under heightened scrutiny - from being investigated by the police to even being charged for their reporting;
- We also saw the shrinking of civic spaces, leading to threats and investigations initiated against human rights defenders (HRDs) and opposition political party members for challenging or calling out the government's actions, ultimately limiting public discourse;
- The culture of secrecy also prevailed through lack of transparency related to COVID-19 mitigation and other public policies. This was further exacerbated by the [infodemic](#), which led to a proliferation of misinformation or "fake news";
- Furthermore, we saw increased bias, hate speech, and online gender-based violence (OGBV) targeting particular communities at risk, and;
- Our privacy was at threat through the increased surveillance and introduction of new technology and applications under the guise of mitigating COVID-19 responses, with little safeguards in place.

It was against this backdrop that we had to deal with the need to stay safe and healthy while also ensuring our advocacy and outreach programmes continued to reach our targeted audience and stakeholders. These developments tested CIJ as we had to deal with a fledgling and growing team, while at the same time adapting to new

ways of operating and coping with the heightened anxiety due to both the pandemic as well as the uncertainties of the new government. Our traditional ways of engagement evolved into a new norm, with new standard operating procedures (SOPs) on working from home and adapting to use of new technologies to effectively and responsibly integrate CIJ's operations, programmatic priorities, and our outreach to different communities and stakeholders.

The reimagined "*Wawasan 2020*", however, saw much to be positive about CIJ and our engagements with various partners. The strength of the organisation grew with a new and young team in place, enriching our work, and meeting the growing demands for action. This was also a year of solidifying the civil society movement and building collaborations – CIJ came together with various partners within the civil society spaces, in particular the Freedom of Expression (FOE) Cluster, or the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on FOE, to stand in solidarity and develop collective campaigns and actions. 2020 was also a timely moment to re-assess, re-consider, and re-envision our strategic engagement and priorities in pushing forward our reform agenda during these uncertain and challenging times.

This Annual Report provides an overview of the various programmes initiated and implemented by the Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) in the past year and its related impacts. It also summarises the levels of engagement, support, and partnerships evident in the effective execution of the programmes.

On this note, I would like to thank our CIJ team of staff, board of directors, and adviser for their unwavering passion, support, and commitment, which underpin all our efforts and continue to allow us to flourish.

On behalf of CIJ, I would also like to thank all our donors and partners, without whose support we would not have been able to grow, demonstrate impact, and put in place stronger institutional foundations.

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# OVERVIEW OF CIJ

**FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**

**RIGHT TO INFORMATION**

**MEDIA STRENGTHENING**

**COMMUNITY MEDIA**

**DIGITAL RIGHTS**





CIJ staff at its 2020 Operational Planning Meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 7 December 2020. PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is a feminist, non-profit organisation that aspires for a society that is democratic, just and free, where all peoples will enjoy free media and the freedom to express, seek, and impart information.

In its 19-year history, CIJ has consistently advocated for a broader space for expression and views, openness of information in Malaysia and free media, and will continue to do so as a civil society organisation dedicated to seeing the reform agenda through.

## OUR STRATEGIC AREAS

Fast forward to the present, the organisation is now among the key civil society groups in Malaysia, championing the same issues that CIJ has always pushed for - freedom of expression (FOE), right to information (RTI), media freedom, community media and digital rights.

Our role as a media watchdog and policy advocacy group focuses on the following:

- **Legislative Reforms:** We actively campaign for the repeal of restrictive laws such as the Sedition Act 1948, Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998, the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1972, and against additional legislations that curbs media freedom, RTI and other legislative attempts that criminalises FOE. Relatedly, we push for concrete reforms and policy changes so that these rights are fully enshrined in law and protected by the government. Another key area of legislative reform is the advocacy for a new legislation on RTI.
- **Media Monitoring and Action:** We monitor the media for FOE infringements, attacks on the media and cases of netizens or human rights defenders (HRDs) having their FOE violated by the State, and provide support and solidarity to the best of our abilities. Our media monitoring data is also used to support our policy and legal reform advocacy.

- **Community Media:** We actively support community media through projects with at-risk and marginalised communities like the Orang Asli and Orang Asli, to ensure that marginalised community voices are disseminated in the media and that they can be their own voices of change, through various media outputs.
- **Network Building:** We consistently work with and engage stakeholders, including local and international civil society groups, journalists, academics, and lawmakers, to build a strong and united network for mutual collaboration on free expression.
- **Public Awareness Raising:** CIJ attempts to raise public awareness on the values of FOE, media freedom, and RTI by organising outreach events. One of our signature events is the annual celebration of the World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) on May 3. We also constantly give our perspectives to issues with regards to FOE, media freedom, and ethical journalism through press statements, briefs, media interviews, social media postings, and regular reviews on the situation in Malaysia.

## OUR STAFFING AND ORGANISING

In 2020, CIJ initiated an institutional strengthening exercise which saw the expansion of the team. CIJ's staff in 2020 comprised eight full-time and part-time staff - an executive director, two programme officers (media strengthening and RTI), a communications coordinator, a finance officer, an administrative officer, an administrative assistant, and the coordinator for the CSO Cluster on FOE.

Taking on the role of mobilising civil society initiatives on our priority issues, CIJ also currently co-chairs the CSO Cluster on FOE, a group of 12 CSOs working to promote FOE in Malaysia. We are also part of the steering committee for the CSO Platform for Reform, a coalition of 70 CSOs focusing on reforms for *Malaysia Baru* that was set up after the Malaysian 14th General Elections (GE14) in 2018. In terms of policy reform, CIJ sits on the Pro-Tem Committee of the Malaysian Media Council (MMC).

## **A. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION**



## Context

Freedom of expression (FOE) is enshrined under international human rights law, including Article 19 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR), and in our Federal Constitution. [Article 10](#) of the Malaysian constitution guarantees all citizens the fundamental right to form associations, to engage in peaceful assembly, and express themselves.

FOE and freedom of speech underpin the fundamental right to seek and exchange ideas, opinions, and information that would enable the public to form their own opinions and allow for dissenting or alternative positions, specifically on issues of public interests, and ultimately promote good governance and hold the State to account. As per international human rights standards, any restrictions to these rights must be legitimate, necessary, or expedient and proportionate, in the interest of maintaining public order, morality, and national security.

In 2020, however, we observed rampant misuse of State mechanisms to criminalise legitimate forms of expression

such as satire, dissent, academic views, and critical thinking and questioning. Not only did the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government fail to reform repressive laws, but there was a pattern of violations using repressive laws to stifle FOE. For instance, the broadly worded Sedition Act 1948, which was meant to be [repealed](#), has been utilised multiple times in 2020 - at least [29](#) cases have been documented by CIJ as part of our media monitoring work. Meanwhile, as of October 2020, Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998 was used to investigate at [least 270 cases](#) concerning supposed misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Section 233 has also been used to prosecute those who allegedly made remarks deemed "insulting" or "offensive" to religion, royalty, or the government.

## OUR WORK IN 2020

### 1. Public Engagements

- Organised 10 online [brown bags](#) on COVID-19 and its impacts on the various intersections of human rights and FOE, during lockdown.

**THE FUTURE OF THE MEDIA IN MALAYSIA**  
Let's talk with the experts  
6 MAY 2020 / 3PM



Gayathri Venkiteswaran  
University of Nottingham  
Malaysia Assistant  
Professor and PhD  
Candidate

Jacqueline David  
Borneo Post  
Reporter/Federation of  
Sarawak Journalists  
Association President

Premesh Chandran  
Malaysiakini CEO/  
Malaysian Media Council  
Pro-Tem Committee  
Chairman

Register here:  
<https://forms.gle/qe2Mh7YVLgwFrUy49>

Dr Mohd Khairie Ahmad  
Universiti Utara Malaysia  
Senior Lecturer in  
Communication Studies

Zurairi A.R.  
Malay Mail  
Assistant News  
Editor/Columnist

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
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**MALAYSIAN DEMOCRACY: WHAT CAN CSOs DO?**  
13 MAY 2020 / 10:30AM



Dr Wong Chin Huat  
Professor  
Jeffrey Cheah Institute on  
Southeast Asia (JCI)

Dr Sonia Randhawa  
Co-Director  
Centre for Independent  
Journalism (CIJ)

Register here:  
<https://forms.gle/W6fKGe9XscNaTqKc7>

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

**FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION IN TIMES OF COVID-19**  
10 JUNE 2020 / 3 PM



M. Saraswathy  
National Union of Workers  
in Hospital Support and  
Allied Services (NUHSAS)  
Executive Secretary

Margaret Chin S.P.  
Malaysian Trade Union  
Congress (MTUC) Sabah  
Vice-Chairperson

Register here:  
<https://forms.gle/af74m5QKpeTEDQPT7>

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

**COMBATING HATE SPEECH IN TIMES OF COVID-19**  
27 MAY 2020 / 3 PM



Nalini Elumalai  
Malaysia Program Officer  
Article 19

Serene Lim  
Partner-Director  
KRYSS Network

Register here:  
<https://forms.gle/GEj3HmaB1qtYEamV8>

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

**INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN MALAYSIA WITH COVID-19**  
3 JUNE 2020 / 3 PM



Tijah Yok Chopil  
Jaringan Kampung Orang  
Asli Semenanjung Malaysia  
(JKOASM) Chairperson

Senator Yang Berhormat  
Adrian Banie Lasimbang  
East Malaysia Rural Indigenous  
Community Activist

Register here:  
<https://forms.gle/jGXDQXLmENag39Zk7>

Fauziah Binti Minsin  
BCI/ Sabah Environmental  
Protection Association (SEPA)

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

**COVID-19 IMPACT: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & INFORMATION CONCERNS FOR WOMEN & GENDER MINORITIES**  
20 MAY 2020 / 3 PM



Yap Lay Sheng  
Senior Research and  
Advocacy Officer  
Women's Aid  
Organisation (WAO)

thilaga sulathireh  
Researcher and  
Community Organiser  
Justice for Sisters

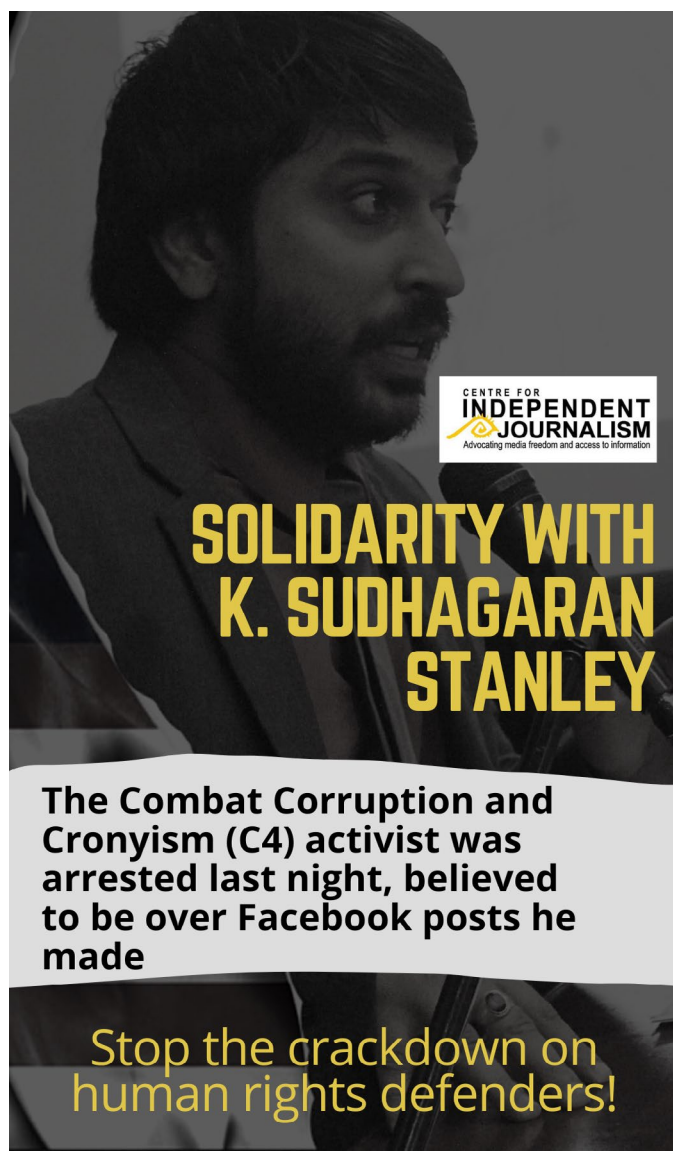
Register here:  
<https://forms.gle/LowVgmVYnq97F8dVA>

CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

- Issued various [statements of solidarity](#) and assisted in raising public awareness around cases of human rights defenders (HRDs) being investigated and arrested for standing for the peoples' rights.
- Took part in [virtual press conferences](#) alongside our civil society stakeholders and partners to raise public attention to the various instances of FOE violations.



Members of the CSO cluster on FOE and activists at a press conference the cluster hosted in conjunction with International Human Rights Day in Kuala Lumpur on 9 December 2020. PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ



- Took part in numerous online webinars to engage with experts and speak to the dwindling situation of FOE and fundamental freedoms in Malaysia.





- Commemorated international days relating to human rights with social media posters and webinars, and took part in social media campaigns championing marginalised voices and their human rights.



### Impacts and Achievements

- Effectively raised public awareness on the state of FOE in Malaysia despite unprecedented challenges brought about by the pandemic and a new authoritarian regime, through entirely digital means of engagement;
- Brought together civil society partners and stakeholders to harmonise advocacy roles and work, and raised more awareness within the civil society network about respective challenges and opportunities, and;
- Remained consistent on our reform position advocating for the repeal and/or amendments to repressive laws such as the the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1972, the Sedition Act 1948, and amending Section 233 of the CMA so that these laws are not utilised arbitrarily to stifle all manner of speech.

## **B. RIGHT TO INFORMATION**

The background of the page is composed of several overlapping, curved shapes in shades of yellow and black. The top left corner is white. The yellow shapes are of varying intensities, from a bright, almost white yellow to a deep, golden yellow. A large, solid black shape is located in the bottom right corner, partially overlapping the yellow shapes. The overall effect is a modern, abstract design.



## Context

The fundamental premise behind promoting right to information (RTI) is that it enables transparency and accountability, and strengthens the public's right to be informed. Access to information facilitates the public in forming opinions about issues that affect us, including holding the government and its related bodies and officials accountable for their decisions or actions that affect the general public. It also promotes constructive participation in any debate or discussions related to specific decision-making processes and/or of public interest, and strengthens rule of law.

Government engagement with civil society on RTI had been progressive since May 2018, when the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government took over. The call for an RTI legislation was adopted into [PH's manifesto](#) as one of the pledges<sup>1</sup>, and this led to similar promises by the political coalition's leaders. The late de facto law minister, Liew Vui Keong, too had made a commitment to realising RTI in Malaysia, going as far as [pledging that the OSA would be repealed](#) - which the PH coalition had not promised as part of its election manifesto. However, with the fall of the PH government in 2020, there has been no clear mandate from the current Perikatan Nasional (PN) government about moving forward with an RTI legislation or repealing the OSA.

There is an urgent need for guaranteed access to information through and beyond the current pandemic. In 2020, we observed a shrinking of spaces for accessing information and media reporting in Malaysia on the basis of COVID-19. For example, access to certain press conferences by ministers providing COVID-19 related updates and information is limited to "official media", most notably the regular press conferences on COVID-19 updates by Senior Minister for Security, Ismail Sabri Yaakob. On 26 June 2020, Boo Su-Lyn, the editor-in-chief of a health news portal, CodeBlue, was [questioned by the police](#) over four CodeBlue reports quoting the declassified findings of an independent inquiry committee into the 2016 fire at Hospital Sultanah Aminah in Johor. She

was investigated under Section 203A of the Penal Code, which criminalises the disclosure of information.

These scenarios are deeply troubling for several reasons. For a start, the public has a right to know what transpired and be able to form their own opinion based on multiple sources of information. Second, any censorship and control of media platforms by the government will create an information vacuum. Third, 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 to the public. Furthermore, any limitation or barriers to access to information impacts transparency, and thus impedes rule of law and good governance.



1. In the PH GE14 manifesto, it states: "The Pakatan Harapan Government will revise the Whistleblower Protection Act 2010, the Official Secrets Act 1972, and the Witness Protection Act 2009, and we will make the necessary improvements. A Freedom of Information Act will be enacted, and financial provisions will be provided to implement this new Act."



Participants at the EGM on the RTI legislation on 23 July 2020 in Pullman Hotel, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ

## OUR WORK IN 2020

### 1. Expert Group Meeting on the RTI Legislation

Following up on the [National Stakeholders Consultation on the RTI Legislation in November 2019](#), CIJ hosted an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the RTI Legislation in July 2020. Organised by CIJ in collaboration with the Legal Affairs Division of the Prime Minister's Department (BHEUU) and the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on Freedom of Expression (FOE), the EGM engaged key stakeholders and practitioners from relevant countries, government agencies, and CSO experts to deliberate on specific outstanding issues. These included the development of a coherent and aligned framework and a roadmap to support the government in promoting and upholding the RTI through an enabling legislation.

Participants comprised experts from different government agencies, civil society organisations, media, academia, and national human rights institutions. International experts present at the event via virtual platforms were Scottish Information Commissioner Daren Fitzhenry, Commissioner Kishali Pinto Jayawardena of Sri Lanka's RTI Commission, Commissioner Ainuddin Bahodury from the Afghanistan Access to Information Commission, former commissioner John Fresly from Indonesia, Dr. Sonia Randhawa from CIJ

(based in Australia), and Dr. Toby Mendel from the Centre for Law and Democracy (Canada).

#### **Impacts and Achievements**

- Mapped the scope of exemptions in an RTI law and reiterated the need to balance national security with public interest;
- Determined ways in which a federal-level RTI law can be streamlined with existing state-level enactments providing for freedom of information, and;
- Encouraged a shift in culture and mindsets towards openness, transparency, and accountability.

“CIJ's efforts in promoting RTI in the country should be highly supported and praised. In the era of information as an economic, social, and political commodity, cultivating a healthy information ecosystem is of high importance to society. May CIJ continue to be committed as an agent of educating RTI to every level of the community!”

– Dr Mohd Khairie Ahmad, Senior Lecturer, UUM





The Penang RTI roadshow's panel session, featuring [from left] Low Chia Ming (Malaysiakini), Meena Raman (Sahabat Alam Malaysia), Predeep Nambiar (Free Malaysia Today), Wathshlah G. Naidu (CIJ), and Dr. Ngo Sheau Shi (USM), at Balai Media, USM, Penang on 10 September 2020.

PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ

“CIJ has been a cornerstone of journalism defence over the past year, especially during the pandemic, taking an unwavering stance on media freedom, as well as standing up for the rights of journalists. It has also vigorously promoted the right to ask for information from the authorities as part of a larger role of the media in providing a check and balance of those in power.”

The RTI campaign by CIJ has been helpful in getting key persons in engaging in meaningful discourse on how we could get the authorities to disclose data that is essentially in the public domain. However, the struggle remains in the form of the OSA, where officials seem so eager to mark inconsequential documents as a secret, when in reality, it should not be secret so long as it does not concern national security.”

– Predeep Nambiar, Journalist, Free Malaysia Today

## 2. RTI Roadshows

In the later part of the year, CIJ embarked on two roadshows - one in Johor, in collaboration with the non-governmental organisation (NGO), ENGAGE Malaysia, and another in Penang, in collaboration with the School of Communication in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The roadshows aimed to hear from the public about what they wanted from a national RTI law, and to share how they could benefit from having a law in place. More roadshows in other states in the country are scheduled to continue into 2021, the results of which are meant to be presented to BHEUU.

### Impacts and Achievements

- Identified challenges faced by members of the public and other stakeholders in seeking information from their respective state authorities;
- Raised awareness on how a legislation on RTI can help people resolve existing day-to-day issues, and;
- Gathered insights on the challenges in obtaining information in states without enactments that support RTI.



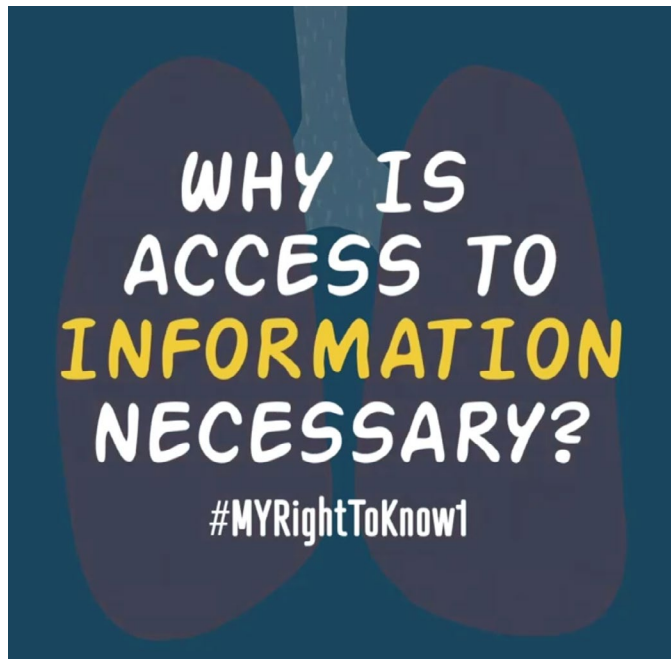
Bersih 2.0 chairperson Thomas Fann (on screen) speaks at CIJ's Johor RTI roadshow engagement session, at ENGAGE Malaysia's office in Johor Bahru, Johor on 3 October 2020. PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ

“CIJ's (RTI) initiative is most important and must continue. I have learnt a lot through the engagements and how important it is to have a Freedom of Information law at the national level. The events did show that information is key for good governance and accountability of governments.”

– Meena Raman, President, NGO Sahabat Alam Malaysia

### 3. Research and Case Studies

- In August 2020, we kickstarted research on the effectiveness of the FOI structures and implementation status in Penang and Selangor (2015-2020) as part of our collaboration with the Jeffrey Cheah Institute (JCI) on Southeast Asia. The research is ongoing. Findings from this research are to be presented to BHEUU in 2021.
- In September 2020, we initiated testing of the existing government systems by filing for requests for specific information on pre-determined issues in Penang and Selangor as well as states with no RTI/FOI legislations or systems.
- Throughout 2020, we carried out a comparative analysis of six global RTI legislative models, culminating in the RTI Research Report. The report is expected to be completed in 2021.
- Also in September 2020, we launched a four-part animated video on RTI: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#).



### 4. Public Engagements

- We launched the #MYRightToKnow online campaign after the RTI EGM in July 2020.
- In August 2020, CIJ and BHEUU jointly organised a briefing on RTI and related developments for the National Human Rights Organisation of Malaysia (SUHAKAM).



- In September 2020, CIJ hosted a [webinar](#) on RTI in conjunction with International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAL).



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(C4)



**KUEK SER KUANG KENG**  
DATA-N



**MEENA RAMAN**  
SAHABAT ALAM  
MALAYSIA



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INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM  
(CIJ)



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ZAN AZLEE**  
FILMMAKER

**MY RIGHT TO  
KNOW  
IN TIMES OF  
CRISIS:  
A TALKSHOW**

To commemorate International Universal Access to Information Day, CIJ and C4 are hosting a session to discuss how the pandemic has affected access to information in Malaysia, why we need to have transparency especially during times of crisis, and how to break the current pattern of secrecy through a new #RTI legislation.

**28 SEPTEMBER  
5PM-630PM  
LIVE ON FB:  
<https://rb.gy/1mx1nz>**








Open Government Action Plan  
Webinar Series

# Freedom Of Information

#MYRightToKnow

Online 2PM September 8  
<https://bit.ly/2DE36HX>






**SinarProject**  
hacking democracy

- From November to December 2020, we held an [online public consultation](#) on what they want to see in an RTI law.
- We also held other webinars in collaboration with our CSO partners.

### **Impacts and Achievements**

- Raised awareness on the importance of RTI and how it can improve the administrative system or governance, and;
- Emphasised key positions, namely;
  - ❖ The principle of maximum disclosure of documents of public interest must be adhered to by the State and a harm test should always be administered to determine legitimacy, necessity, and proportionality before restricting access to information and criminalising its disclosure;
  - ❖ Replace the culture of secrecy with a culture of transparency and accountability at all levels of governance, and;
  - ❖ Repeal the draconian OSA and enact an RTI legislation.

## **C. MEDIA STRENGTHENING**

The background of the page is composed of several overlapping, curved shapes in various shades of yellow and a solid black shape in the bottom left corner. The curves are smooth and organic, creating a modern, abstract design. The text 'C. MEDIA STRENGTHENING' is positioned in the upper left area, within a white space created by the curves.

**“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.”**

### Context

Since coming into power in March 2020 and increasingly so during the pandemic, the Perikatan Nasional (PN) government's attempts at silencing dissenting voices and undermining media freedom signalled the downwards spiral of Malaysia into a state where censorship and attempts to control the public narrative were at the forefront of the actions undertaken by the government last year.

Misguided and disproportionate actions against media institutions and reporters were not counterproductive as it shut down flow of information and crucial public discourse in dealing with public health issues. Furthermore, it created a need for media self-censoring and toeing the government's line to remain viable and to survive the ongoing economic challenges.

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. High-profile cases include that of former South China Morning Post Correspondent (SCMP) [Tashny Sukumaran](#), CodeBlue Editor-In-Chief [Boo Su-Lyn](#), [Malaysiakini](#) and its Editor-In-Chief, Stevan Gan, [Gerakbudaya and the authors of the “Rebirth: Reformasi, Resistance, and Hope in New Malaysia”](#) book, and [Al Jazeera](#)<sup>2</sup>.

Various repressive and archaic laws were used against the media and journalists last year to target and intimidate the media using these laws when the government was portrayed in a negative light. 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.

Following years of extensive engagement and lobbying with various stakeholders, on 16 January 2020, CIJ was appointed by the Minister of Communications and Multimedia as a member of the Pro-Tem Committee to develop the proposal on a Malaysian Media Council (MMC). The report and draft bill was submitted to the new minister under the PN regime in July 2020. However, there has since been little development due to the limited engagement between the current minister and the pro-tem committee.

**2. 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.**



Members of the Malaysian Parliament at a meeting to provide updates on the MMC bill, in Parliament building, Kuala Lumpur, on 26 August 2020.  
PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ

## OUR WORK IN 2020

### 1. Towards a Malaysian Media Council Campaign

We launched our [Malaysian Media Council \(MMC\) campaign](#) on 14 August 2020, which included the assessment of CIJ's role as members of the Pro-Tem Committee. During the session, several challenges towards accelerating advocacy and policy reform were identified.

A two-step engagement methodology was adopted, namely, to focus on social media awareness and shifting stakeholder engagements to digital conferencing means.

In 2020, in support of the MMC plan, CIJ reached out to the 222 Members of Parliament (MPs) and media practitioners in Malaysia to gather statements of support for the MMC.

Subsequently, on 26 August 2020, CIJ coordinated a parliamentary briefing in Parliament on behalf of the pro-tem Committee, where MPs were briefed on the concept of a MMC, while pro-tem committee members fielded questions on their proposed draft bill. MPs were generally receptive, with vocal support expressed for the abolition of the PPPA and various oppressive State apparatus. However, reservations were voiced around the feasibility of the funding required for the MMC as well as the willingness of the present government to entertain such a bill.

Such reservations were similarly expressed at an earlier consultation with CSOs on 28 October 2020, when garnering feedback on the MMC bill. At the meeting,

which was co-hosted by CIJ and Gerakan Media Merdeka (GERAMM) to compile civil society feedback to share it with the MMC pro-tem committee, CSO partners were generally supportive but brought up the question of whether the Media Council could adapt to an age of online news and social media given the rapid shift towards online media not governed by the PPPA.

These questions have been compiled and are being incorporated into further stakeholder engagements with CSOs, media, and parliamentarians. We also plan to issue informational materials in the near future covering an FAQ regarding the media council.

Video statements from MPs were also recorded in support of the council, and shared on CIJ's social media. Similar videos involving media practitioners, CSO partners, and the public were recorded and released on our social media platforms. CIJ also published infographics detailing what the public, journalists, and CSO partners want from a MMC, as well as on what the MMC is all about.

### Impact and Achievements

- **Raised awareness on the importance of the MMC, how it can improve the quality of media, and enhance media freedom;**
- **Developed a pool of materials on the MMC ready to be deployed for future awareness campaigns, and;**
- **Created a broad coalition of media, CSOs, MPs, and members of the public who are generally supportive of MMC efforts.**



# WHAT IS A #MediaWeWant MEDIA COUNCIL?

Instead of a centralised government body, could the media industry regulate itself via a media council?

Many countries such as India, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and most of the EU have self-regulatory media councils.



## WHY DO WE NEED A MEDIA COUNCIL?



The aims of the Council are to:

1. Defend, uphold, and promote freedom of the media in Malaysia;
2. Promote a legislative and regulatory environment conducive to media freedom;
3. Establish the Code of Conduct, and to promote ethical conduct among media practitioners;
4. Establish an independent body that responds to public complaints, mediates complaints and advocates on behalf of media industry professionals;
5. Support media literacy among the public;
6. Support the financial sustainability of the media industry;
7. Accredite members of the media, and protect media professionals in their professional capacity;
8. Conduct relevant research and publish reports on issues related to the media;



The idea of a media council is not a new one in Malaysia. We have been discussing it since the 1980s but a lot of progress has been made in the past year.

- In January 2020, a pro-tem committee was to develop the scope, structure and operations of the Council as well as to relatedly draft the Bill.
- Since then, a report has been authored, along with a draft bill that could be put to parliamentary debate at any time.
- While the pandemic and political transitions have slowed things, there has never been a better time for a media council!

“

## WHY DO WE NEED A MEDIA COUNCIL?

HEAR IT FROM CIVIL SOCIETY!



#MEDIABEWANT  
SUPPORT THE FORMATION OF THE  
MALAYSIAN MEDIA COUNCIL

CENTRE FOR  
INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

“

Supaya rakyat umum tahu perkara yang betul dan tidak mengelirukan.

RUSINAH SINTI  
Jaringan Orang Asal  
SeMalaysia (JOAS)

#MEDIABEWANT  
SUPPORT THE FORMATION OF THE  
MALAYSIAN MEDIA COUNCIL

CENTRE FOR  
INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

“

The media council is a step forward in the effort to actualize press freedom, which is one of the important pillars in a democratic country.

The media council introduces several things that are intended to strengthen press freedom as well as the quality of journalistic works. Among them are the participation of the public in supervising the press and the functions of the Media Council and to establish and enforce the journalistic code of ethics with the media organization.

NALINI ELUMALAI  
ARTICLE 19

#MEDIABEWANT  
SUPPORT THE FORMATION OF THE  
MALAYSIAN MEDIA COUNCIL

CENTRE FOR  
INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

“

The Media Council would allow for greater overall governance of media in Malaysia, pushing for a level-playing field, open competition, independent and free media and allow public opinion to be taken into consideration in media reforms.



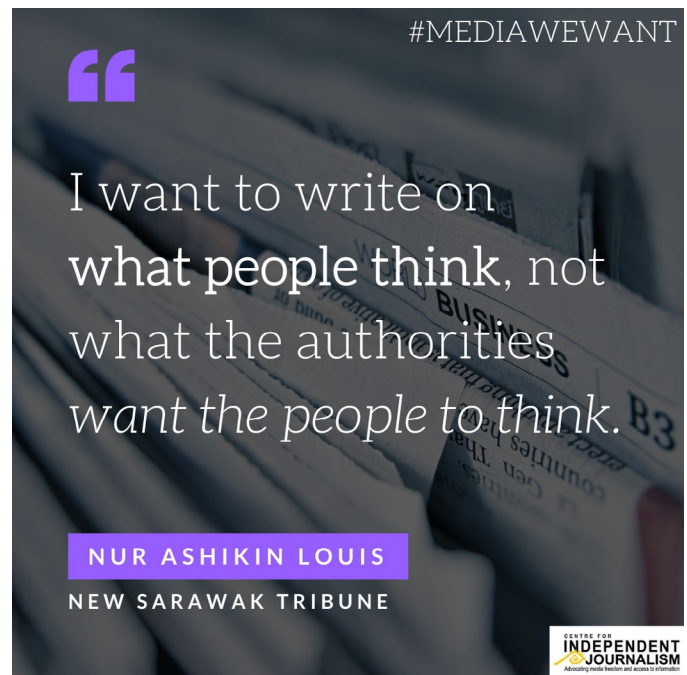
TRICIA YEOH  
IDEAS Malaysia

#MEDIABEWANT  
SUPPORT THE FORMATION OF THE  
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JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

“ CIJ has been instrumental in their struggle towards civil rights in Malaysia, particularly those concerning media practitioners and individuals' right to information. Vocal and steadfast, is how I would describe them. ”

– Kenneth Tee Yoong Shern, Journalist, Malay Mail



“ The MMC is a step forward in the effort to actualize press freedom, which is one of the important pillars in a democratic country. The MMC introduces several things that are intended to strengthen press freedom as well as the quality of journalistic works. Among them are the participation of the public in supervising the press and the functions of the MMC, and to establish and enforce the journalistic code of ethics with media organisations. ”

– Nalini Elumalai, Programme Officer, ARTICLE 19 Malaysia



## 2. Public Engagements

- Launched our inaugural [#MediaWeWant](#) campaign in conjunction with World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD), which saw journalists from all sectors in the industry, past and present, sharing their views on media freedom in Malaysia and the challenges they face on a regular basis.



**”**

**JOURNALISTS  
SHOULDN'T BE  
QUESTIONED FOR  
ASKING QUESTIONS.**

**WE SHOULD BE  
GIVEN ANSWERS.**

ALYAA ALHADJRI  
JOURNALIST

#MediaWeWant  
#KebebasanMedia  
#WorldPressFreedomDay2020

CENTRE FOR  
**INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM**  
Advocating media freedom and access to information



**”**

**MEDIA BUKAN ALAT  
PENYEBAR PROPAGANDA  
KERAJAAN.**

**MEDIA ADALAH  
PENYAMPAI HASRAT  
RAKYAT.**

FARAH MARSHITA ABDUL PATAH  
PENCERUSI KESATUAN  
KEBANGSAAN WARTAWAN  
SEMENANJUNG MALAYSIA

#MediaWeWant  
#KebebasanMedia  
#WorldPressFreedomDay2020

CENTRE FOR  
**INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM**  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

- Launched [#MediaJagaMedia](#), a three-part online campaign highlighting how COVID-19 and the 2020 change in government impacted the Malaysian media landscape, what the media wants from the government, and culminating in an online petition to the prime minister, communications and multimedia minister and home minister. The campaign was jointly organised by CIJ, GERAMM, Article 19 Malaysia, the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia (FCCM) and the Institute of Journalists (IOJ) Malaysia.

The media industry in Malaysia, like most work sectors, suffered greatly when COVID-19 hit and with the change of government this year.

**In the last year alone:**

- Several newspapers closed down, reduced their newsstand prices or reduced the number of times it prints in a week.
- Many journalists and media personnel were retrenched or are in the process of being let go, with some going to court to fight their case.
- Journalists, bloggers and individual media entities are being investigated by the State or have court proceedings initiated against them.

**Call on the Prime Minister, the Communications and Multimedia Minister and the Home Affairs Minister to act!**

1. Stop the crackdown on the media, and drop and cease all current and future investigations or court cases into journalists or media entities.
2. Spearhead interim, financial aids and measures to ensure the sustainability of the media during this difficult time.
3. Prioritise the issue of unemployed media personnel and those whose jobs are at threat due to COVID-19 or the economy, through economic stimulus packages.

**English Bahasa Melayu**

Call on the Prime Minister, the Communications and Multimedia Minister and the Home Affairs Minister to intervene and address the challenges faced by the

Dear Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin,  
[Prime Minister of Malaysia]

Dear Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah,  
[Minister of Communications and Multimedia]

Dear Dato Seri Hamzah Zainuddin,  
[Minister of Home Affairs]

I am writing to bring to your urgent attention, the current and pertinent

First name \* Last name \*

Email \*

Country \*

**Submit**

\* By submitting this form, you consent to publicly provide your name and email address to the three recipients named above, as well as CIJ. Your data will not be shared beyond these four recipients.

#SiapaJagaMedia #MediaWeWant

## How COVID-19 and the change in government this year impacted the Malaysian media landscape

1

**This year has been tough for the media industry in Malaysia. Reporters got let go, newspapers folded, journalists were probed and some media outlets are even facing legal action.**

**Let's show some solidarity!**

**Take part in the #SiapaJagaMedia & #MediaWeWant campaign today, jointly organised by CIJ, Gerakan Media Malaysia (GERAMM), Article 19 Malaysia, the Foreign Correspondents Club of Malaysia (FCCM) and the Institute of Journalists Malaysia (IOJ).**

**Use the two hashtags and share these posters on your social media networks from 12pm to 5pm today!**

The media industry in Malaysia, like most work sectors, suffered greatly when COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, and a partial lockdown was imposed in the country in early 2020 and for most of the year.

Since then, there have been:

- an increasing number of reports of **newspapers and other publications closing down** or reducing the number of times it prints in a week;
- a large number of journalists and media personnel reported as **facing retrenchment or in the process of being let go**, and;
- reported cases of **sexual harassment in the workplace**, issues surrounding **contract staffing**, and instances of **online gender-based violence**.

2

#SiapaJagaMedia #MediaWeWant

## SIAPA JAGA MEDIA apabila

Syarikat akhbar kita ditutup dan semakin ramai kita hilang kerja?

Pandemik terus mengurangkan pendapatan pengiklanan, hingga semakin ramai dari kita hilang kerja?

Kita disiasat atau didakwa dibawah undang-undang zalim berkaitan dengan laporan kita?

Kita ditegur secara terbuka oleh para menteri, serta mengalami gangguan "trolling", "doxing" atau maklumat peribadi kita diviralkan?

Kita dilarang membuat liputan sidang media "rasmi" jika bukan dari agensi media milik kerajaan?

#SiapaJagaMedia

## THE MEDIA WE WANT

Harus bebas untuk melapor dengan bebas, pastikan rakyat dimaklumkan dan kerajaan bertanggungjawab sepenuhnya

Tidak boleh menjadi alat mencokam media, melalui propaganda dan tapisan maklumat

Perlu disokong oleh kerajaan melalui pakej bantuan kewangan dan insentif cukai

Tidak seharusnya bersekongkol menonjolkan berita yang berat sebelah kepada masyarakat

Menuntut persekitaran yang selamat dan membolehkan kita bertugas agar tidak perlu mengagadai kesihatan dan keselamatan

#MediaWeWant

## THE MEDIA WE WANT

Must keep the public fully informed and hold the State accountable

Cannot become tools for propaganda and censorship

Needs financial aid packages and tax incentives from the government

Should not be complicit in perpetuating only one-sided news

Requires a safe and enabling environment so we don't need to jeopardise our health and safety

#MediaWeWant



- Launched [#MemoriMediaMerdeka](#), an eight-part online campaign on the herstory of Malaysian media, covering themes such as social justice, early media depiction of feminism, advertising, media laws and education. The campaign was spearheaded in conjunction with Merdeka and Malaysia Day.

## Impact and Achievements

- Strengthened relationships with media stakeholders and developed new ones;
- Raised awareness and solidarity about the present state of media freedom in Malaysia and for those in the media, and;
- Effectively portrayed CIJ as an advocacy organisation that considers historical and cultural contexts that shape media operations in Malaysia today.



The Malayan newspapers of the time played a huge role in rallying national support for Merdeka, bridging ethnolinguistic gaps, and as claimed by Othman Wok, even shaped the language around the very concept of Independence for Malaya.

In the case of Merdeka, the media were not only conveyors of news, but they **made the news and were community leaders in their own right**. What allowed them to do so was:

- Editorial independence
- A pool of dynamic talent,
- An understanding from government that it had to work with the media, not against it.

In 1959, as UMNO took over ownership of Utusan and it lost much of its editorial independence, Yusof Ishak sold his remaining shares and resigned, leaving the paper he founded with much of his star team.



Source: Majalah Wanita, May 1976.  
Collection of Sarah Amer and Dina Zaman @ Malaysia Design Archive

## FOR THE "MODERN" WOMAN

Started in 1969 by the Utusan media group, Wanita was a magazine that aimed to cater to the expanding needs and worldviews of the "modern" woman.

By the 1980s, Wanita and its competitor Jelita were dominating magazine stands, with Wanita having the **highest circulation of any magazine (103,862 in March 1981)**. It had also expanded its focus from that of the 1970s housewife to that of the **working woman, the celebrity, and the socialite**.

Coverage was often progressive, highlighting women-led initiatives and achievements by women.

The next few images show a march by female students for Maulidur Rasul, a women-owned bank, and the first female dental surgeon to graduate from Universiti Malaya.



An exploration of the different laws that have put a leash on the voice of media throughout our history

## PRINT AND THE LAW

In Malaysia, the dissemination of information and the regulation of printing is **considered a Home Ministry affair**, in addition to being governed by the Communications and Multimedia Ministry.

The ability to print is viewed as a **matter of national security**.

The government often sees itself as a **caretaker of a "sensitive" or even "fragile" society** where the "wrong words" could "provoke" something untoward.

Often, preserving peace has been used as the **justification for widespread controls and the crackdown of media**.

These apparatus create a culture of fear where **self-censorship becomes the norm**.



## PRINTING PRESSES ACT 1948

The act was born in the midst of the **Emergency Era**, crafted by a colonial administration.

While used against communist propaganda, the act also allowed for the **suppression of other voices caught in the net: labour unions, social activists, and community organisers**.



“The press in Malaysia faces a double whammy situation, yet precariously manoeuvring difficult times to stay afloat in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just barely six months into 2021, journalists, editors, and news anchors had been targeted and being called up for investigations by the law enforcers for reporting. CIJ has been vocal and monitoring the situation in Malaysia.”

– Norman Goh, Journalist

Front page of Utusan Melayu covering Merdeka, 1957



Source: Wikimedia Commons

## Utusan and "Merdeka"

"According to one account, it was **Utusan Melayu** that popularised 'Merdeka' as a neutral slogan for independence. In a television interview recently, a former reporter for Utusan Melayu, Othman Wok, who later became Minister of Social Affairs from October 1963 to June 1977 in Lee Kuan Yew's government, attributed the widespread adoption of 'Merdeka' as a rallying call to Utusan Melayu's editor Yusof Ishak's decision to use this slogan in place of communal ones, because it could be shared across ethnic groups."

"Utusan Melayu was very influential in the 1950s, as its team of able reporters followed the vibrant political developments in Singapore and Malaya very closely. The Malay paper, which was written in Jawi script, had a strong voice and influence in public opinion and set the trend not only for the Malay-speaking population in Singapore but also in Malaya. Its messages also reached across the language barrier, as Malay was at that time a lingua franca – a shared common language – understood by all and sundry."

– Dr Imran bin Tajudeen (currently Asst. Professor at NUS)

Source: Tajudeen, I. MERDEKA! Singapore's Merdeka Talks of 1956, 1957, and 1958, and Merdeka proclamations before 1960. <http://singaporestories.com/merdeka/singapore-merdeka-talks-of-1956-and-1957-and-merdeka-proclamations-of-1959-1962-and-1963/>

Source: Tajudeen, I. MERDEKA! Singapore's Merdeka Talks of 1956, 1957, and 1958, and Merdeka proclamations before 1960. <http://singaporestories.com/merdeka/singapore-merdeka-talks-of-1956-and-1957-and-merdeka-proclamations-of-1959-1962-and-1963/>



That being said, Wanita had a definite focus on high-profile individuals such as celebrities and politicians' families.

While not without their problems, Wanita magazine and others of their type did provide a valuable and popular space of support for women's voices.

That being said, the magazines and the issues they covered were often relegated to being regarded as "soft news", while the platform of prime-time media and the national news agenda remained male dominated.

How are our media doing today? Have we moved forward in our portrayal of women? Have we grown the spaces available for the freedom of expression of women?

## CONTROL OF IMPORTED PUBLICATIONS ACT 1958

In 1957, Malaya became independent. The following years saw the media industry viewed as an important tool for nation building i.e. creating a nationalist narrative.

Thus, the control of national media and ability to restrict imported publications was crucial. This was also at the height of the Cold War, as the Vietnam War 1955-1978) was raging on.

This law accompanied other efforts such as the takeover of Utusan Melayu (1958-1961) putting in under the direct editorial direction of UMNO.



Three major newspapers, the English-medium 'Star', the Chinese 'Sin Chew Jit Poh' and the Malay weekly 'Watan' had their licenses revoked during Operasi Lalang.

Source: Tajudeen, I. MERDEKA! Singapore's Merdeka Talks of 1956, 1957, and 1958, and Merdeka proclamations before 1960. <http://singaporestories.com/merdeka/singapore-merdeka-talks-of-1956-and-1957-and-merdeka-proclamations-of-1959-1962-and-1963/>

Source: Tajudeen, I. MERDEKA! Singapore's Merdeka Talks of 1956, 1957, and 1958, and Merdeka proclamations before 1960. <http://singaporestories.com/merdeka/singapore-merdeka-talks-of-1956-and-1957-and-merdeka-proclamations-of-1959-1962-and-1963/>

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### 3. Media Monitoring

True to its role as a media watchdog<sup>3</sup>, CIJ regularly monitors the media for instances of infringements on freedom of expression (FOE) and freedom of speech (through the use of repressive laws or State intimidation tactics, for example), unethical media reporting and threats to media freedom, and arrests, investigations and charges surrounding "fake

news". The evidence-backed data is then used to inform CIJ's policy and legal reform agenda and programmatic work. We also convert the data we collect into [infographics](#) on thematic areas such as COVID-19 "fake news" cases and regular [reports](#) which provide thematic analyses on the state of FOE in Malaysia.



3. CIJ is known for its "Watching the Watchdog: Media Monitoring for 13th General Election" project. This media monitoring project was the biggest exercise of its kind ever undertaken by civil society in Malaysia, monitoring elections news in 29 media platforms across Malaysia's four main languages during the 13th General Elections.



# "FAKE NEWS" ON COVID-19 IN MALAYSIA

## SINCE THE START OF THE OUTBREAK

### 274

cases were opened by the police and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) on COVID-19 "fake news".

### INVESTIGATION PAPERS



### CHARGED IN COURT



### 35

individuals were prosecuted in relation to spreading COVID-19 related "fake news". Twelve people were issued warnings.

### 21

people admitted spreading COVID-19 "fake news" and were either fined, jailed or released on bail. Thirteen cases are still in trial.

### PLED GUILTY



### CASES PROBED



### 137

cases are still under investigation by the police and MCMC for spreading "fake news" on COVID-19\*. 90 cases were classified as "No Further Action".

*"I thank CIJ for assisting me in my case for voicing out against "fake news". Conscientious voices need guardians in our country. CIJ plays that role dutifully. Respect."*

– Liew Lip Nan, Netizen

# MEDIA RESTRICTIONS IN MALAYSIA

CENTRE FOR  
INDEPENDENT  
JOURNALISM  
Advocating media freedom and access to information

## ◆ THE VARIOUS OPPRESSIVE LAWS THAT HAMPER MEDIA FREEDOM IN MALAYSIA ◆

### Sedition Act 1948

Criminalises speech with "seditious tendency" without requiring proof of intent. What is 'sedition' or 'seditious' is extremely vague. It is also open to subjective interpretation as words such as 'hatred', 'contempt', 'discontent', 'feelings of ill-will' and 'disaffection' are used without any definition.

### Official Secrets Act 1972

Prohibits the dissemination of information classified as an official secret. The government has significant leeway in allowing any document to be classified as secret, with no requirement for harm and without requiring any relation to national security, international relations or defence. No time limits for documents classified secret and the Act ousts the court's jurisdiction to review the classification of the document.

### Section 233 of the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998

Journalists can be charged with a broad and extremely subjective definition of "improper use of network facilities or network service". to knowingly make, create, solicit or initiate a communication which is obscene, indecent, false, menacing or offensive with the intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass another person.

### Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984

The Act provides that it is a criminal offense to possess or use a printing press without a licence granted by the Home Affairs Minister. The Minister is given "absolute discretion" in the granting and revocation of licences.

### Section 504 of the Penal Code

Journalists can be charged with "intentional insult with intent to provoke a breach of the peace."

### Section 114A of the Evidence Act

An Internet user is deemed the publisher of any online content unless proven otherwise. It also makes individuals and those who administer, operate or provide spaces for online community forums, blogging and hosting services, liable for content published through their services.

# 2020

HAS SEEN AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF INSTANCES WHERE MEDIA HAVE BEEN REPRESSED CITING THESE LAWS, AMONGST OTHERS

## WHAT CAN THE MALAYSIAN COUNCIL DO



Governments cannot be the sole arbiters of truth by having the power to arbitrarily decide what information can and cannot be in the public domain and what has been "misquoted" or "misreported".



The best way to counter this will be through a transparent and independent self-regulatory body such as the proposed Media Council. It will become central in managing allegations of misconduct by the media and in providing an avenue for the arbitration of public complaints.



While there is a need to handle misconduct among the media, responses must be proportional and not result in a crackdown on the freedom of information. The Media Council would provide a way for the media to self-regulate, instead of being subject to heavy handed centralised censorship.



“CIJ has and is playing an important role to promote and defend the exercising of FOE by raising public awareness, and engaging stakeholders and lawmakers. My aspirations for CIJ are as follows: to continue pushing for reforms, and to stand and unite as one voice and support bloggers like me in whatever ways possible.”

– Dian Abdullah, Blogger

“CIJ should keep up the pressure on the government to promote media freedom and FOE.”

– Boo Su-Lyn, Editor-In-Chief, CodeBlue

## CIJ calls out two Malay dailies for demonising Women's Day March

Sunday, 10 Mar 2019 03:18 PM MYT

By R. Loheswar







## Surat kepada penyunting berita

Pusat Jurnalisme Bebas (CIJ atau *Centre for Independent Journalism*) merujuk kepada artikel yang diterbitkan di laman web Berita Harian pada 13 Jun 2020 bertajuk, "[Pasar Borong KL kini. selamat kepada pelanggan. bersih bagi warga asing](#)". Pihak kami amat bimbang kerana artikel berkenaan berpotensi untuk menyebarkan retorik xenofobik dan perkauman terhadap pekerja migran, ketika ucapan kebencian terhadap minoriti semakin meningkat berikutan serangan semasa terhadap Rohingya dan pendatang serta pelarian lain di Malaysia.

Laporan berkenaan bermula dengan memuji usaha Kementerian Wilayah Persekutuan melalui Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur dan Jabatan Imigresen Malaysia untuk "membersihkan" Pasar Borong Kuala Lumpur di Batu Caves. Pilihan bahasa yang digunakan amat membimbangkan. Sebagai contoh, wartawan yang menulis berita ini mendakwa bahawa kawasan kaki lima dan tempat letak kereta yang "sebelum ini dipenuhi dengan penjaja warga asing serta sampah sarap" kini bersih, dan pengunjung kini lebih mudah untuk meletak kenderaan di dalam tempat parkir. Laporan kemudian memetik pengunjung dan pekerja di pasar yang mengesahkan pemerhatian wartawan, yang secara langsung memperburukkan lagi dan mengabadikan bias dan prasangka terhadap pekerja migran. Perkataan "bersih" juga digunakan sekurang-kurangnya 10 kali dengan rujukan kepada pekerja asing.

“CIJ has always been on the frontlines, defending our FOE through various platforms, taking a consistent and firm stand against any violation of human rights, and standing in solidarity with any individual or group exercising their constitutional rights but are still being witch-hunted by the State machinery. I appreciate how CIJ helped UMAN Y and I on many occasions by providing us moral support and financial assistance. CIJ also took the lead to issue a joint statement in support of UMAN Y after the latter received intimidation and harassment over its

article about the role of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in a constitutional monarchy.

I remember when I was detained overnight and later charged within a week for filming a police raid, CIJ, together with the CSO Cluster on FOE, urgently offered the LDF to me. The aid was really helpful for a fresh graduate like myself earning less than RM3,000 per month. The claiming process was also seamlessly streamlined for me.”

– Wong Yan Ke, Student Activist

“Solidarity from CIJ has effectively raised the concern of the public over the State's intimidations (against UMANY) such as continuous police investigations and demanding show-cause letters from Public Service Department (JPA)-sponsored UMANY members, while the LDF provided by CIJ (in collaboration with other CSO Cluster on FOE members) serves well as a protection for activists.

Only with the active collaboration among CSOs and NGOs will we be able to seek changes in this nation.”

– **University Malaya Association of New Youth (UMANY)**

As part of our newly-launched media monitoring and action portfolio, CIJ acts on these cases by providing support and solidarity through social media postings, press statements, or joint statements with other CSOs, besides connecting them to our pool of human rights lawyers and the CSO Cluster on FOE's [Legal Defence Fund](#). CIJ has so far assisted and provided support to various human rights defenders, netizens, university students, activists, and political leaders with FOE cases against them.

Besides that, we respond to instances of unethical media reporting by issuing public statements or letters to the editor to request they take down their stories and abide by international human rights standards and ethics.

### **Impact and Achievements**

- Assisted and provided solidarity and support to those with FOE cases against them;
- Became more credible and sought after among those who champion and require FOE support and solidarity, and;
- Developed data-backed documentations and analyses to support our advocacy.

“I think that CIJ has done important work in recent times, particularly given the worsening state of press freedom and crackdowns on freedom of speech. On a personal level, I am grateful for the solidarity and support shown to me by CIJ - not just in the May Day interrogation but also by providing me with a lawyer when a book I contributed to was banned. It's important that journalists, policy workers and human rights defenders know that they aren't alone. Professionally, I'm very grateful for CIJ's tireless monitoring, updates and statements, especially when it comes to live updates on court cases, as the pandemic has limited our access to these events.”

– **Tashny Sukumaran, Ex-Journalist**

## **D. COMMUNITY MEDIA**





Community researchers interview participants in Melangkap for the IEA Sabah. PICTURE CREDIT: FAUZIAH MINSIN

## Context

Going back to our roots, CIJ actively works alongside marginalised and at-risk communities in our efforts to promote freedom of expression (FOE) and realise fundamental liberties. Our community media projects (CMP) support these communities in reclaiming spaces and being their own voices in advocating for change, through various media outputs, and ties in with our fundamental mission to support such communities in reclaiming spaces.

CIJ's CMPs aim to strengthen a constituency of marginalised members of society as voices of change through diverse community media platforms. It includes capacity building initiatives, networking and engagement and other initiatives, with the overall aim of promoting FOE and realising fundamental liberties, spanned over several months and incorporating various digital tools and research methodologies.

## OUR WORK IN 2020

### 1. Initiation of Information Ecosystem Assessments

Following the initiation of inception meetings in 2019 to determine interests and to initiate the collective planning process, CIJ and partners initiated needs assessments, or Information Ecosystem Assessments (IEA), with key communities that we wanted to work with. A context-specific framework was developed with the support of Internews and CIJ resource persons. Each IEA included survey distribution, focus group discussions (FGDs) and validation exercises, and aimed to understand each community's information and media needs, challenges in accessing said information or media, and what they want to achieve through a CMP.

Last year, we saw through three IEA projects: one with Orang Asal communities in Melangkap and Bongkol, Sabah; another with Orang Asal communities in Kg Lebor and Nanga Bekatan, Sarawak, and; another nationwide project with youths in collaboration with Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) in Kedah. These projects are to continue in 2021 with skills training and knowledge building sessions on the basis of needs identified as part of the respective community's IEA.

### Impact and Achievements

- Executed and completed three IEA projects from scratch and despite unprecedented challenges due to travel restrictions and the digital divide;
- Developed and strengthened a consultative framework on information and media needs for CIJ community media projects, and;
- Created more awareness on community media needs among key constituents CIJ wishes to work with.



CIJ's IEA Sarawak lead researchers having a meeting with Nanga Bekatan village chief Michael Anak Jantan (in black shirt) before travelling to the longhouse for interviews. PICTURE CREDIT: TRACY PATRICK



An FGD taking place at UUM as part of the Youth IEA. PICTURE CREDIT: DR. MOHD KHAIRIE AHMAD

“The role and contribution of CIJ in driving a healthy and effective communication and media ecosystem can be identified through several of its programs. The IEA report is among various significant moves in strengthening the communication and media environment in the country. CIJ has shown the ability to contribute to the communication-media aspects of the country in terms of policy, practices, and educating the community.”

– Dr Mohd Khairie Ahmad, Resource Person, CIJ Youth IEA





Participants before the start of the survey in Nanga Bekatan, Sarawak. *PICTURE CREDIT: TRACY PATRICK*



Community researchers interview participants in Melangkap for the IEA Sabah. *PICTURE CREDIT: FAUZIAH MINSIN*

## **E. DIGITAL RIGHTS**

The background of the page is composed of several overlapping, curved shapes in shades of yellow and orange. A large, solid black circle is positioned in the bottom-left corner, partially overlapping the yellow shapes. The overall design is modern and minimalist.



## Context

CIJ's strategic focus on digital rights recognises the right to express ourselves and access information through a safe, secure, and sustainable digital space. The aim is to ground our work within the human rights framework of access, privacy, equality, non-violence, justice, autonomy, and sustainability.

Our initial focus in 2020 was to prioritise the government's engagement with the multistakeholder Internet Governance Forum (IGF). To that end, a meeting was organised with the Communication and Multimedia Ministry to explore possible collaborations. Discussions around a possible digital rights forum were, however, suspended due to the change in government and de-prioritisation of such a discourse by the ruling regime.

## OUR WORK IN 2020

### 1. Surveillance and Privacy

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic saw increased surveillance and privacy intrusions as part of public health crisis management and mitigation. The measures adopted by the government to facilitate contact tracing included introduction of MySejahtera app which had limited safeguards in place in relation to the data gathered through this application.

It became critical to ensure a more effective understanding of data privacy and protection in times of COVID-19. Accordingly, CIJ refocused its priorities on knowledge generation and initiated webinars and discussions on possible principles to be developed in guaranteeing data protection.



BROWN BAG ON COVID-19/FOE

# PRIVACY & SURVEILLANCE

23 APRIL 2020 / 3PM



Meeting link: <http://tiny.cc/dzfinz>

Meeting number: **574 288 510**

Password: **EBvxpb93tV3**  
**(32897293 for phones)**

Come join us for a session of  
sharing, reflection and solidarity  
strengthening

**Jac sm Kee**

Digital Rights Activist



Advocating media freedom and access to information



## 2. Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APrIGF)

CIJ also explored its engagement on internet governance by organising a panel at the APrIGF in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Jakarta Office, CSO partners Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) and Kryss Network, and the Foundation for Media Alternatives (Philippines).

The panel focused on promoting internet and human rights, and related challenges in establishing multistakeholder collaborations. It was premised on discussions and sharing of experiences on the impact of digital spaces and how multistakeholder initiatives could be institutionalised at the national level. It directly explored the most effective and tested approaches to getting governments to engage with CSOs and other stakeholders in defending human rights and promoting diversity and gender equality within the digital spaces.

The APrIGF, as such, was a critical space that enabled the learning from partners in the region with similarities and

shared experiences, including from Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore, among other countries. We were able to share and study good practices on how reforms and impacts on freedom of expression (FOE) vary within the region and the extent they are influenced by the advocacy of different influencing and pressure groups.

Further, as this was CIJ's first time initiating such a discussion at the regional level, we, together with our implementing partners, established invaluable contacts and maximised the space to bridge and build a relationship with the various stakeholders and government representatives attending the Forum. This helped support us as we move ahead with our advocacy and engagement on digital rights at the national level.

## 3. Public Engagements

CIJ took part in a [social media campaign](#) in response to a public consultation on a proposal for a national digital ID system organised by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission.



**JAC SM KEE**  
ACTIVIST



**MING-KUOK LIM**  
UNESCO JAKARTA



**LISA GARCIA**  
FOUNDATION FOR MEDIA ALTERNATIVES



**DOBBY CHEW**  
SUARAM



**WATHSHLAH NAIDU**  
CENTRE FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM (CIJ)

**Join us at the Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum 2020!!**

**PROMOTING INTERNET AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**Challenges in building multi-stakeholder collaborations**

In this challenging climate of political transitions and pandemic, new obstacles and circumstances have emerged. How do we continue to evolve our approach and re-vision multi-stakeholder engagement in promoting internet and human rights? Come participate in this fireside chat to find out more!

**28 SEPTEMBER**  
**0645-0745 UTC**  
**2:45-3:45PM (M'SIA)**  
**Register at**  
**<http://ap.rigf.asia/#2020rigf-reg>**





**APRIGF.ASIA** **ROOM 1**

# APRIGF 2020

## Virtual Conference

Internet Governance for Good:  
Norms, Standards and Mechanisms

### 27-30 September 2020

**APRIGF.ASIA** #APrIGF2020 *Promoting internet and human rights* Internet Society



PowerPoint Slide Show - [APrIGF2020 - S08] - PowerPoint

### S08. PROMOTING INTERNET & HUMAN RIGHTS: CHALLENGES IN ESTABLISHING MULTISTAKEHOLDER COLLABORATIONS

**Date: 28 SEP 2020 (MON)**  
**Time: 06:45 - 07:45 UTC**

- Moderator:**
  - Jac SM Kee
- Speakers:**
  - Wathshlah Naidu - Centre for Independent Journalism
  - Ming-Kuok Lim - UNESCO (Jakarta)
  - Lisa Garcia - Foundation for Media Alternatives
  - Dobby Chew - Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)

**SPONSORS:** APNIC Internet Society IGFA Internet Governance Forum Support Association

**HOST:** APRIGF.ASIA Multistakeholder Steering Group

**SECRETARIAT:** WWW.asia

**APRIGF.ASIA** #APrIGF2020 *Promoting internet and human rights* Internet Society

# **F. COMMUNICATIONS**

The background of the page is composed of several overlapping, curved shapes in shades of yellow and orange, creating a dynamic, abstract design. A large, solid black curved shape is positioned in the bottom right corner, contrasting sharply with the yellow background.



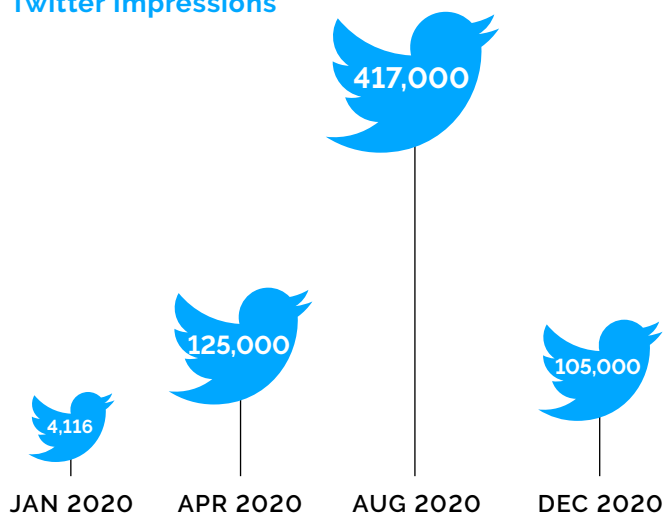
Challenges to FOE in the current climate, ranging from censorship of the media and an undemocratic regime in power, made CIJ's public advocacy challenging last year. It was more difficult than ever to impact change through traditional means of activism - such as having press conferences, which was no longer doable when travel restrictions and lockdown orders were imposed. So, CIJ had to review and reprioritise its communications strategies.

We began to truly utilise our social media platforms by spearheading virtual campaigns and creating hashtags for the public to use. Immediately following the first lockdown in March 2021, we initiated regular brown bag sessions and webinars for the CSO network, the public, and media.

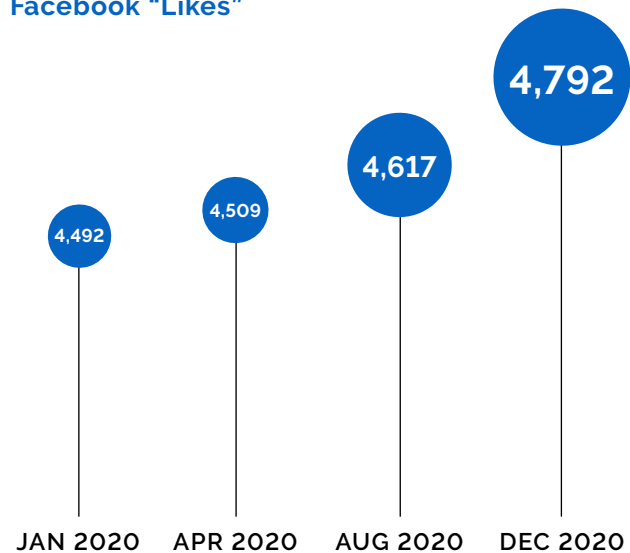
We developed infographics and animated video clips, and spearheaded newfound collaborations with CSO partners and media contacts to push our advocacy forward. Besides that, efforts were taken to revamp our website and strengthen our existing communications and crisis plans.

Accordingly, our social media presence boosted significantly from the start of the year to the end, in particular, our Twitter presence. Furthermore, we had more media publishing our statements and recommendations. We specifically saw an increase in vernacular Chinese media. We also found that CIJ was becoming more well-known, not just among the civil society network, but among ordinary netizens.

### Twitter Impressions



### Facebook "Likes"



"We also found that CIJ was becoming more well-known, not just among the civil society network, but among ordinary netizens."

One of CIJ's highest Twitter impressions from a single tweet - 142,000 impressions.

# 推動公民知情權

## 大馬獨立新聞中心聯辦說明會

（新山3日讯）大马独立新闻中心（CIJ）与愿景工程（ENGAGE）今日联合主办“公民知情权”（Right to Information）说明会，让公众了解身为大马公民的知情权，确保政府的行事透明并受到人民监督。

### 瓦特斯拉： 让民众了解自身权益

大马独立新闻中心执行董事瓦特斯拉受访时指出，上届希盟政府曾承诺废除《官方机密法令》，惟国盟政府上台后却认为该法令仍有必要，并否决废除该法令的议程，也没有公布修改法令的具体执行时间。

她表示，政府有义务提供媒体获取新闻资讯的环境与权利，并让媒体将正确的资讯传达给社会大

众，而媒体只有掌握更多的知情权，才能对事件展开全面调查，提高新闻报道的品质，而不仅限于报道政府给出的资讯。

她说，该中心致力于推动政府制定及颁布有关“公民知情权”的法律，以满足公众对政府治理的透明度及杜绝贪污的问题，因此到檳城、柔佛、

吉兰丹、沙巴及砂拉越等州属展开巡回说明会，让民众了解自身权益。

她透露，推动我国“公民知情权”的制定，必须有全民的参与及支持，社会各阶层都有必要了解该法令的重要性，因此希望更多公众加入推行与宣导该项法令的工作。

说明会出席者，尚包括：该中心“公民知情权”项目负责人罗莎娜、公关协调员维诺及物流助理帕里玛拉。



瓦特斯拉（右二）：媒体有权利获取更多知情权，传达正确的资讯给公众，出席者还有罗莎娜（左一起）、维诺及帕里玛拉（右一）。





31.10.2020 SATURDAY சனிக்கிழமை \*Daily Readers 440,000 | \*9

■ மக்கள் 30 ஓசை 317 ■ திருவள்ளூர் ஆண்டு 2051 ■ சார்வரி ஆண்

# மகாதீரின் எல்லை மீறிய கருத்து



கோலாலம்பூர், அக். 31-

பிரான்சில் தற்போது நிகழ்ந்து வரும் கொடூரச் சம்பவங்கள் குறித்து முன்னாள் பிரதமர் துன் டாக்டர் மகாதீர் முகமது வெளியிட்டிருக்கும் சர்ச்சைக்குரிய கருத்துகளை நிராகரித்து கடுமையாக ஒப்புக்கொள்ள மறுப்பதாக மலேசியாவுக்கான அமெரிக்கத் தூதர் கமலா ஷிரின் லக்ஷித் தெரிவித்தார்.

இங்கு வெளியிடப்பட்ட இரண்டு பத்திகள் அறிக்கையில் பாரிஸ் மற்றும் நைட் பெருநகரங்களில் நிகழ்ந்த வன்செயல்களில் உறவுகளைப் பறிகொடுத்த குடும்பங்களுக்கும் பிரான்ஸ் அரசாங்கத்திற்கும் தமது ஆழ்ந்த இரங்கலைத் தெரிவித்துக் கொண்டார்.



மகாதீரின் அண்மைய அறிக்கையை ஏற்றுக்கொள்ள முடியாது. கருத்துச் சொல்வது அவரின் உரிமை. அவரின் சுதந்திரமும் கூட. ஆனால், அதேசமயத்தில் வன்செயலுக்குத் தூண்டுவது கூடாது என்று கமலா அவ்வறிக்கையில் சுட்டிக்காட்டியிருக்கிறார்.

இ




### Media Coverage

- We issued 26 [press statements](#) and 18 joint statements.
- We had at least 142 [online news reports](#) quoting CIJ.
- We organised numerous online webinars and brown bags.
- We gave several exclusive interviews to media organisations like BFM 89.9, ASTRO Awani, Malay Mail, Al-Jazeera, Sin Chew Daily and Malaysiakini.





**马来西亚星洲日报 Malaysia Sin Chew Daily** ✓

11 h · 

【深度】马来西亚的资讯自由法一直被忽略，人民如何利用资讯来监督政府？

Centre for Independent Journalism  
[#RTI](#) [#RightsToInformation](#) [#资讯自由法](#)  
[#百格](#) [#pocketimes](#)  
 See Translation



而有关稽查报告却在《官方机密法令》下被归为机密

30.9K views

CIJ Co-Director Ding Jo-Ann speaks to Sin Chew Daily's Pocket Times show in an exclusive interview in August 2020.

## Polis digesa beri alasan kukuh siasat aktivis rakam video

Faris Fuad - November 11, 2020 @ 11:18am  
faris.fuad@bh.com.my



# CIJ MALAYSIA



Podcast > Evening Edition > Evening Edition > Livestreaming A Hearing In Court

## LIVESTREAMING A HEARING IN COURT

Ding Jo Ann, Advisor, Centre for Independent Journalism

22-Apr-20 18:00



Source: Free Malaysia Today

## **G. INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING**



## 1. Strategic Review

As CIJ continued to expand its engagements with different stakeholders in taking forward the reform agenda, the organisation identified the need to strengthen itself as an institution and evolve into a sustainable organisation that is able to meet the current social, political, and economic demands. One of our key priorities was to update the operational systems and processes.

In August 2020, CIJ held a strategic review exercise to initiate the process towards the development of a three-year strategic plan that would include a coherent strategy guiding us in our programmes and institutional strengthening process. In preparation for a long-term

strategic planning exercise, the review process looked at CIJ's performance during the last 12 months and the current situation; how to reinforce CIJ's mission and values; what CIJ should be focusing on, and; the roadmap needed for CIJ's strategic planning. Attendees for the two-day review meeting included CIJ's directors, advisers, staff, and invited partners.

This initial step was meant for CIJ's leadership team to start mapping out what issues were most pressing for the organisation. This was necessary because there was a new executive director and staff who had joined the organisation. Additionally, strategies for working with the government needed reviewing following the fall of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government at the end of February 2020.



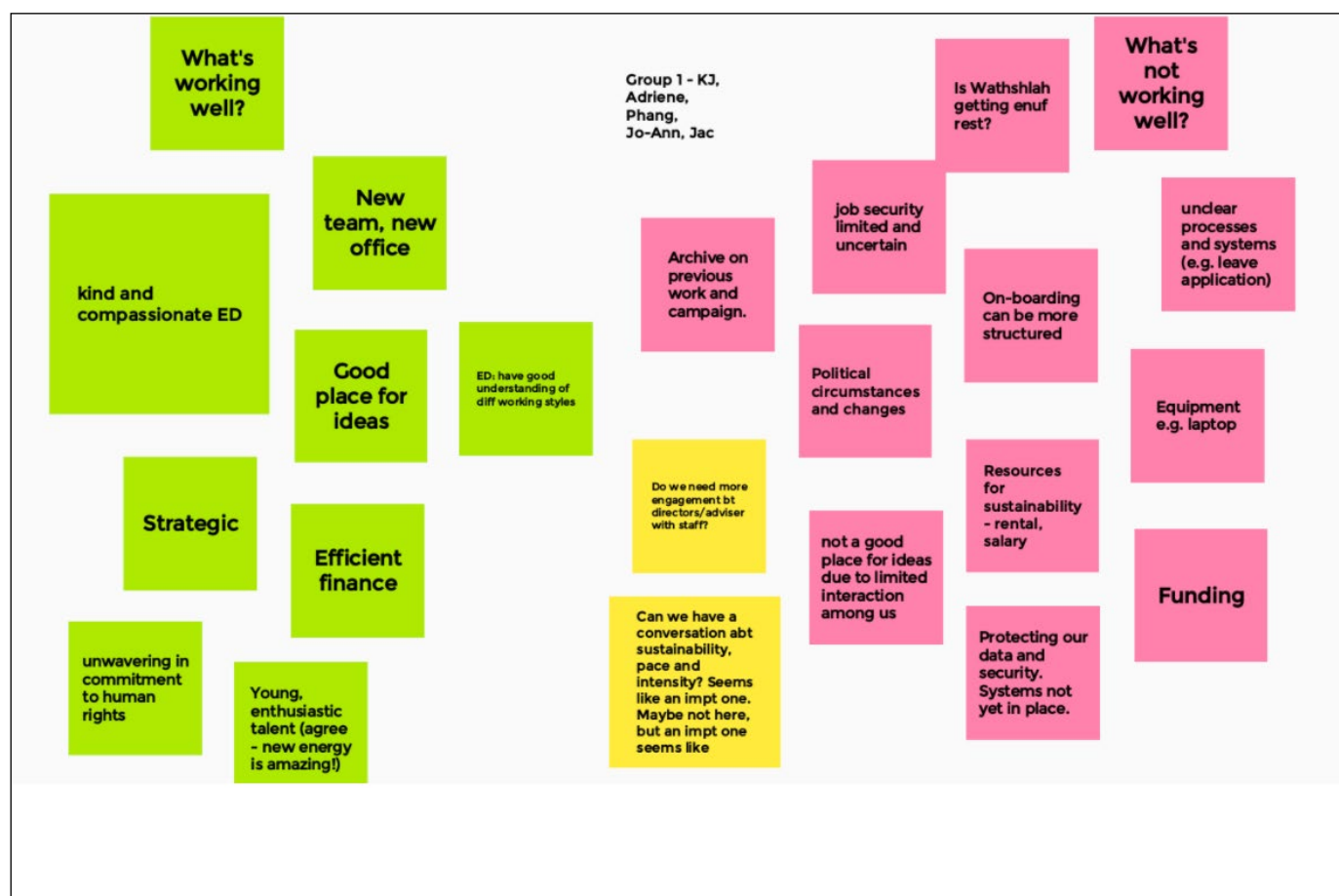
Day 1 attendees.



Day 2 attendees.



Day 1 attendees' response on Jamboard to the question on CIJ's focus for the next 3 years.



Day 2 attendees' responses on "What's working well?" and "What's not working well".



## 2. Operational Planning Meeting

In November of 2020, CIJ organised a two-part operational planning meeting to strengthen the institutional capacity of CIJ to be able to more effectively plan our priorities for 2021 and develop an organisational workplan.

As part of the meeting, the CIJ team reflected on its past and current strengths, planned our work for 2021 and

improved our ways of working together and the ways CIJ staff relate to each other. The meeting also saw discussions and agreements reached relating to risk mitigation, budget allocation, resource person identification, and on key performance index and staff development.

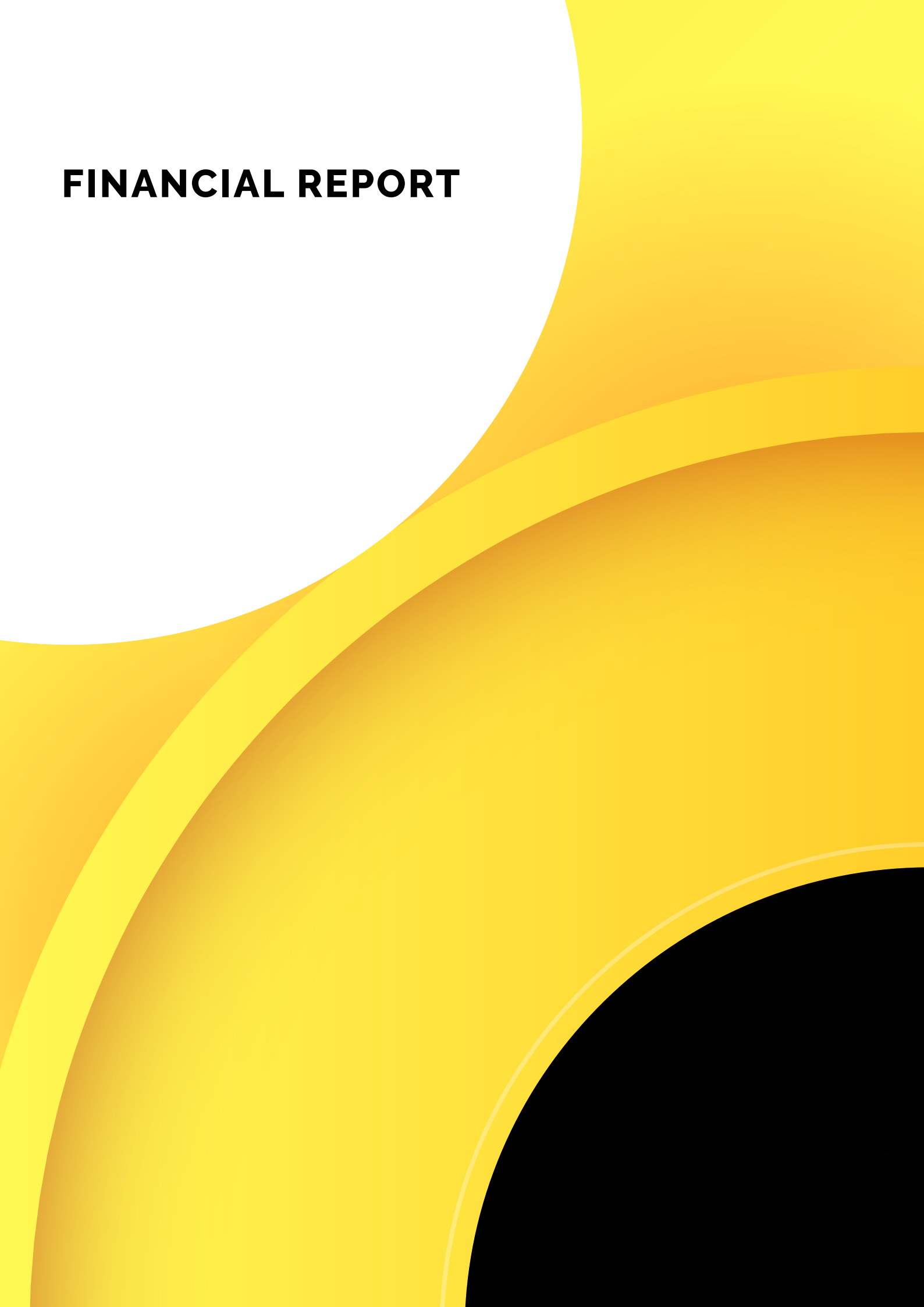


CIJ staff attending Day 2 of the organisation's 2020 Operational Planning Meeting in Cyberjaya on 9 December 2020.  
PICTURE CREDIT: CIJ





# FINANCIAL REPORT




## CIJ'S ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR 2019/2020

|                                     | MYR            |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>INCOME:</b>                      |                |
| Core Funding                        | 79,825         |
| Project Grants                      | 837,018        |
| Other Grants                        | 24,516         |
| Other Income                        | 20,294         |
| <b>TOTAL INCOME</b>                 | <b>961,653</b> |
| <b>PROGRAMME COST:</b>              |                |
| Right to Information                | 158,224        |
| Media Strengthening                 | 172,525        |
| Freedom of Expression               | 34,647         |
| <b>INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING:</b> |                |
| Personnel Cost and Fringe           | 429,970        |
| Administrative Expenses             | 71,784         |
| Taxes                               | 15,817         |
| <b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>            | <b>882,966</b> |
| <b>NET BALANCE</b>                  | <b>78,687</b>  |





Centre for Independent Journalism

 [cijmalaysia@gmail.com](mailto:cijmalaysia@gmail.com)

 <https://cijmalaysia.net>

 <https://www.facebook.com/CIJ.MY>

 [https://twitter.com/CIJ\\_Malaysia](https://twitter.com/CIJ_Malaysia)

 [https://www.instagram.com/cij\\_malaysia](https://www.instagram.com/cij_malaysia)