



MALAYSIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

A SNAPSHOT OF 2022

Media Landscape Report 2022

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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.

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Table of Contents

1. Media Landscape Overview

- a. Changes in Malaysian Political Landscape
- b. Media Council
- c. Global ratings

2. Economic Challenges of the Malaysian Media Industry

- a. Economic Overview
- b. Effects of Economic Status of Organisations

3. Media Under Attack

- a. Use of Repressive Laws
- b. Issues on Media Access and Safety of Media Workers

4. 15th General Elections Media Reporting

- a. Reporting on Race and Religion
- b. Xenophobia against the Refugee and Migrant Communities
- c. Misogynistic Tropes against Women Candidates

5. Social Inclusiveness and Media Reporting

- a. Gender Reporting
- b. Suicide Reporting
- c. Moral Policing
- d. Censorship and limitations on artistic freedoms

6. Recommendations

1. Media Landscape Overview

a. Changes in Political Landscape

Malaysia welcomed a new Prime Minister and government in 2022, making this administration and its leader the fourth in three years. After a vigorous election campaign and five-day long wait post-polling day, [Anwar Ibrahim](#) was sworn in as Prime Minister on 24 November 2022¹. This alongside the promise of reform and the coming together of a new unity government brought optimism to a rakyat that had experienced political and economic instability in the last three years.

The year 2022 was shrouded with anticipation for the 15th General Elections (GE15), with all political parties revving up campaigns and tensions in order to garner support. Since the last election in 2018, Malaysia has seen the formation of new political parties and coalitions such as Perikatan Nasional, which includes Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU) and Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS); as well as Gerakan Tanah Air, involving the newly established Parti Pejuang Tanah Air (PEJUANG) by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad. This polling season also saw the return of Pakatan Harapan (PH) and Barisan Nasional (BN) with a more fractured United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)². The tensions between the parties especially PN and PH had ramped up in the final months leading to dissolution of Parliament, especially on issues focusing on race, religion, royalty and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ) persons³.

Moreover, the lead up to elections were embroiled with economic and social concerns such as Budget 2023 and worries of campaigns and polling day taking place during [flood season](#)⁴. GE15 also marks the first general election post implementation of the ruling in which lowered the voting age to [18 years old](#), making them a new young cohort and key campaign targets to influence the outcome of the elections⁵.

¹ A. Ananthalakshmi, Mei Mei Chu and Rozanna Latiff, "Malaysia's Anwar becomes prime minister, ending decades-long wait," *Reuters*, 25 November, 2022, [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023]

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/malaysias-former-ruling-bloc-may-back-anwar-pm-race-2022-11-24/>

² The breakdown of political parties and coalitions can be found in a segment of *The Star Newspaper* (online) with the link: <https://election.thestar.com.my/parties.html>

³ This observation was made during CIJ's GE15 Monitoring Pilot Research in August and September 2022 as well as the GE15 Monitoring Pilot Research in October and November 2022. Data and further findings from the project will be released in a report soon.

⁴ Ekhwan Haque Fazlul Haque, "GE15: EC can halt polls if major floods occur, says Ismail Sabri," *New Straits Times*, 6 November, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023]

<https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/11/847591/ge15-ec-can-halt-polls-if-major-floods-occur-says-ismail-sabri>

⁵ Azzman Abdul Jamal and Nur Hasliza Mohd Salleh, "What Undi 18 voters want at GE15," *MalaysiaNow*, 30 October, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2022/10/30/what-undi-18-voters-want-at-ge15>

The Ministry of Communications and Multimedia was renamed as the Ministry of Communications and Digital (KKD) with Fahmi Fadzil as the Minister and Teo Nie Ching as Deputy Minister. According to the PH manifesto, this government's top priorities with regards to [press freedom](#) are to⁶:

- i. Repeal draconian laws such the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998 and Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984,
- ii. Set up the Malaysian Media Council,
- iii. Amending the Whistle-blower Protection Act to protect whistle-blowers and,
- iv. Introduce the Right to Information (RTI) Act and limit the implementation of the Official Secrets Act (OSA).

It is critical to monitor and hold the new government to account in upholding and following through their promises.

b. Media Council

In its Manifesto, Pakatan Harapan stated that one of the party's main priorities with regards to media freedom was to revive efforts to establish the Malaysian Media Council. Shortly after GE15, Deputy Minister of Communications and Digital Teo Nie Ching took charge of the portfolio on Malaysian Media Council. This began with engaging multiple stakeholders including the Pro-Tem Committee established in 2020, media leaders and civil society organisations.

The proposed establishment will be critical in moving ahead with an independent, multi-stakeholder mechanism to self-regulate media and set a higher standard of reporting.

c. Global Ratings

Malaysia has ranked [113 in the Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\) annual Press Freedom Index 2022](#)⁷, with the country's best ranking just revealed at [73 for the year 2023](#)⁸. This indicates an exponential progress, including on the basis of the country's best ranking of 101 in 2020.

The RSF Index ranking for 2022 and 2023 was decided based on five indicators: political, economic, legislative, social and security. We scored the lowest under the legislative indicator

⁶ Pakatan Harapan, *Kita Boleh Manifesto*, 2023. [online] [Accessed 28 April 2023] <https://kitaboleh.my/>

⁷ Reporters Without Borders RSF. Malaysia, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://rsf.org/en/country/malaysia>

⁸ Reporters Without Borders RSF. Malaysia, 2023. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://rsf.org/en/country/malaysia>

and the highest in the security category. The high scoring under the security indicator most likely contributed to the increase in overall scoring, as in comparison with other countries, including in Myanmar and Vietnam, Malaysian journalists rarely experience physical attacks, including killing, rape or enforced disappearances.

The improvement in rating compared to the rank 2022 may also be an indication to the sentiment of optimism as Malaysia welcomed a new Prime Minister and unity government at the end of 2022. It was also noted by RSF that the changes in government and renewal of government coalitions contributed to the progress in countries like Malaysia. This has given a sense of stability to the country that has experienced political and economic turmoil in the last three years. Despite that, it is important for this government to uphold Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression (FOE) in hopes to not experience a backslide once again.

Despite welcoming a new unity government that has made promises to uphold press freedom in the country, CIJ has noted instances of censoring the media and trying to influence the narrative on topics such as public morality and [LGBTIQ](#)⁹. In this regard, the State will need to adopt progressive measures at all levels of leadership in order to facilitate an open, transparent, and competitive environment that would ensure media viability and promote ethical and responsible reporting within the broader information ecosystem.

The promise seen in the current ranking of 73 must be upheld by the government as it strives to improve Malaysia's media freedom in accordance with international human rights standards.

2. Economic Challenges of the Malaysian Media Industry

a. Economic Overview

Malaysia recorded an annual economic growth rate of [8.7%](#) in 2022. This improvement is markedly higher than last year at 3.1% and is the fastest growth rate since 2000¹⁰. The [expansion](#) in economic activity was attributed to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in the beginning of

⁹ Zaidi Mohamad, "Thor: Love and Thunder tidak ditayangkan di Malaysia," *Berita Harian*, 28 July, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.bharian.com.my/hiburan/selebri/2022/07/981219/thor-love-and-thunder-tidak-ditayangkan-di-malaysia>

¹⁰ Bank Negara Malaysia (2023). Economic and Financial Developments in Malaysia in the Fourth Quarter of 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] https://www.bnm.gov.my/-/qb22q4_en_pr

2022¹¹. The media, which was impacted by the pandemic and COVID-19 restrictions in 2020 and 2021, has also bounced back in 2022.

Traditional print media continued to experience financial challenges due to a decrease in income from subscription and drop in advertising revenue.

Nonetheless, media owner's advertising revenue for 2022 was forecasted to [expand by 14%](#) to reach RM6.1 billion¹². This is an improvement to the advertisement revenue recorded at [RM5.1 billion in 2021](#)¹³. Digital advertising, dominantly driven by social media advertising, was also expected to grow.

This complements the trends observed by CIJ in the last year, where fewer numbers of newspapers and publications have stopped their print editions, like 2021. In April 2022, [The Malaysian Reserve \(TMR\) ceased printing](#) publications due to strains brought on by the pandemic as well as waning print circulation, high prices for print, advertising revenues at an all-time low and digital migration¹⁴. However, TMR [returned to printing](#) its papers once a week in October 2022¹⁵.

Malaysia's largest media conglomerate, Media Prima Bhd recorded a [net profit](#) of RM53.9 million on the back of RM 997.9 million in revenue in December 2022¹⁶. This showed a 4% increase compared to the period ending in December 2021. The conglomerate saw a spike in advertising revenue from businesses with RM 748.9 million in 2022. The group's television stations TV3 and

¹¹ Rajiv Biswas, "Malaysia records buoyant GDP growth in 2022," *S&P Global Market Intelligence*, 17 February, 2023. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/mi/research-analysis/malaysia-records-buoyant-gdp-growth-in-2022-feb23.html#:~:text=The%20Malaysian%20economy%20showed%20rapid,a%20rebound%20in%20private%20consumption>

¹² Daljit Dhesi, "Media owners' advertising revenues seen to surge," *The Star*, 27 June 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2022/06/27/media-owners-advertising-revenues-seen-to-surge>

¹³ Daljit Dhesi, "Advertising industry set to recover this year," *The Star*, 28 June 2021. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2021/06/28/advertising-industry-set-to-recover-this-year>

¹⁴ New Straits Times, "The Malaysian Reserve to cease print publication," *New Straits Times*, 22 April, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/04/791105/malaysian-reserve-cess-print-publication>

¹⁵ The Malaysian Reserve, "We're Back!" *The Malaysian Reserve*, 3 October, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2022/10/03/were-back/>

¹⁶ Asila Jalil, "Media Prima posts second consecutive 12-month profit as revenue edges close to RM1bil," *New Straits Times*, 22 February, 2023. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.nst.com.my/business/2023/02/882449/media-prima-posts-second-consecutive-12-month-profit-revenue-edges-close>

8TV had recorded a growth in viewership amongst Malay and Chinese audiences, allowing Media Prima Television Networks to remain as the most watched network in Malaysia¹⁷.

On the other hand, similar to 2021, [Astro Malaysia Holdings Bhd](#) experienced a decline in revenue for the third quarter of 2022¹⁸. The drop in revenue to RM 926.18 million from RM1.02 billion was reportedly due to a decrease in subscription revenue and merchandise sales, which had to balance out the rise in advertising revenue¹⁹.

[Media Chinese International Limited \(MCIL\) Group](#) reported a profit in the year ending 31 March 2022. The group's total revenue for the year increased by 5.8% to USD 122,387,000 due to a rise in the turnover for MCIL's print and publishing businesses²⁰. In terms of the group's sustainability, MCIL plans to continue its efforts in diversifying and expanding their digital revenue nationally and globally.

The varying levels of growth experienced by media conglomerates indicate the possible strengthening of media viability and sustainability which was previously exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, the ongoing crisis of media viability, also impacted by news aggregators and the digital siege by social media platforms, if remain unaddressed, would potentially contribute to the economic threats to the safety of journalists and other media workers. As discussed below, economic threats to media viability and safety of journalists have far reaching implications on the transparency, accountability, and media pluralism, thus undermining the role of media as the fourth estate.

b. Effects of Economic Status of Organisations

The year 2022 did record a slight [economic improvement](#) for Malaysia, however the rakyat have experienced fear of unemployment and the rise of cost of living²¹. Despite a projection made by experts that Malaysian companies will not be following the trend set by the United States of America, letting go of employees en masse, 2022 has been acknowledged to be a [challenging](#)

¹⁷ Ibid, *New Straits Times*.

¹⁸ Sufi Muhamad, "Astro's 3QFY2023 net profit drops amid higher forex losses, declares 0.75 sen dividend," *The Edge Markets*, 15 December, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/astros-net-profit-shrinks-rm58-mil-3q-higher-net-financing-cost-announces-075-sen-dividend>

¹⁹ Ibid, *The Edge Markets*.

²⁰ Media Chinese International Limited (MCIL). (2022). *Media Chinese International Limited Annual Report 2021/2022*. Pg 15. (online) [Accessed on 2 May 2023] https://www.mediachinesegroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/e_00685_Annual-Report.pdf

²¹ References made to the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute titled "Uncertainties in Malaysia's Economic Recovery" by Cassey Lee. 19 May, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2022-53-uncertainties-in-malaysias-economic-recovery-cassey-lee/>

[year for Malaysia](#)²². A total of 34,388 Malaysians had lost their jobs in 2022 as compared to 61,360 recorded in 2021 and 107,704 Malaysians in 2020²³.

However, with the recovery of the economy in 2022, media houses have halted the retrenchment of employees. “In fact, most houses are back to rehiring as the economy recovers. Malay Mail itself just went on several cycles of hiring reporters and sub-editors. Monthly wages have also gone back to the previous level,” says Zurairi A.R., news editor at the Malay Mail²⁴. Despite this upturn, journalists and media workers are still feeling the effects of the pandemic.

Most notably, the issue of labour rights for journalists and media workers was brought to the forefront in 2022 as the case of Sydney Yap made headlines. On 10 August 2022, the national news agency BERNAMA threatened to sue its former Mandarin News journalist [Sydney Yap Xi Ni](#) for voicing her concerns in a [Facebook post](#) a few days prior^{25,26}. The post had brought up concerns regarding workplace culture at the BERNAMA Mandarin News team. Sydney had claimed that the department’s employees had faced pay cuts when BERNAMA absorbed it in 2019²⁷.

The journalist also brought up concerns regarding the hiring practices at the news agency and how it affects the quality of news produced by the Mandarin News team due to reduced staffing. In the same post, Sydney had alluded that these concerns were systemic issues in the media industry.

Following this, [BERNAMA Chief Executive Officer \(CEO\) Roslan Ariffin](#) denied claims of a defamation suit against Sydney and said that she had never raised these complaints during her

²² Ahmad Mustakim Zulkifli, “No US-style mass lay-offs expected in Malaysia, experts say,” *MalaysiaNow*, 7 February 2023. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2023/02/07/no-us-style-mass-lay-offs-expected-in-malaysia-experts-say>

²³ Ibid. *MalaysiaNow*.

²⁴ Zurairi A.R., News Editor from Malay Mail had provided CIJ with this information in April 2023.

²⁵ MalaysiaKini, “Bernama mahu saman wartawan penyiarannya,” *MalaysiaKini*, 10 August, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023]

https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/631578?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook

²⁶ Yap, Sydney. 葉詩妮 XINI. “深夜思來想去，不吐不快……” Facebook, 7 August, 2022. [https://www.facebook.com/xxinniyap/posts/pfbid02UGHcXXxDorqXdDcV1sRmHRihmyWyLmWVcPGm1DQq1RBD Ahe24fWL7BWt6jNe2rwl?_cft_\[0\]=AZX9lumDgyXy6ZoKJirsMVATH6zCyCo7G5Qk-reuPQJ7-Cw379OEwC_4jvkKR14ZIMMFgZhcVSurPsTBcmzZXj0TwLzx6nd_gIKIsTbUrxkGgbch13b4i2tMRH-1wVCqty3mLZclUTsLEz3b498bh207fI5_RmPwyUTJyiYs7RTFKVAtnE6Jw-s2pWI-3Jjj6uiM-aCwj_KWU2_08BcbNIA&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/xxinniyap/posts/pfbid02UGHcXXxDorqXdDcV1sRmHRihmyWyLmWVcPGm1DQq1RBD Ahe24fWL7BWt6jNe2rwl?_cft_[0]=AZX9lumDgyXy6ZoKJirsMVATH6zCyCo7G5Qk-reuPQJ7-Cw379OEwC_4jvkKR14ZIMMFgZhcVSurPsTBcmzZXj0TwLzx6nd_gIKIsTbUrxkGgbch13b4i2tMRH-1wVCqty3mLZclUTsLEz3b498bh207fI5_RmPwyUTJyiYs7RTFKVAtnE6Jw-s2pWI-3Jjj6uiM-aCwj_KWU2_08BcbNIA&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R)

²⁷ Ibid. Sydney Yap’s Facebook post dated 7 August, 2022.

three-year tenure at the company²⁸. Roslan also stated that widespread media reports of Sydney's post had tarnished the reputation of BERNAMA and the government²⁹.

On 18 August 2022, Deputy Communications and Multimedia Minister Zahidi Zainul Abidin defended the government's practice of hiring contract staff, including within the national news agency BERNAMA and BERNAMA TV, which are under its purview. The Deputy Minister had also made disparaging remarks regarding [Sydney's mental health](#)³⁰.

The role of vernacular news and the stories produced in Malaysia is incredibly important especially in this multilingual nation. BERNAMA announced that its 6.30pm Mandarin news programme will be reduced to five days from the initial seven days due to staffing issues.

BERNAMA CEO Roslan Arifin further stated to reporters that the [role of the Mandarin desk](#) is merely to translate news content produced by BERNAMA Malay News desks³¹. This undermines the critical work and role of the Mandarin desk and completely disregards the importance of multilingual media. This also denies that the Mandarin team has produced many in-depth reports over the years, fulfilling its social responsibility as an informative and critical media entity.

The incidents following Sydney's post have raised serious concerns regarding the lack of job security and sustainability, independence of the media industry and the role of vernacular media in Malaysia.

Regarding the lack of job security and sustainability, media workers experience unpredictable work hours. They are expected to be available and mobile by the editors and publishers to meet the news cycle's demands and breaking stories' demands. While these work practices are standard and expected of those in the media industry, the level of dedication and commitment from the media workers must be commensurate in the form of secure employment, pay increments and promotions. Experiences shared by Sydney and others in the industry indicate a

²⁸ FMT reporters, "Bernama drops plans to sue newsreader for defamation," *Free Malaysia Today*, 10 August, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023]

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/08/10/bernama-drops-plans-to-sue-newsreader-for-defamation/>

²⁹ Ibid. *Free Malaysia Today*.

³⁰ Fion Yap, "'Zahidi defends Bernama's contract hires, wants to 'check health' of ex-staff,'" *Malaysiakini*, 18 August, 2022, [online] [Accessed on 28 April 2023] <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/632607>

³¹ Sydney Yap, "Responding to the Bernama CEO's counter-arguments against my claims" *Focus Malaysia*, 13 August, 2022, [online] [Accessed on 28 April 2023] <https://focusmalaysia.my/responding-to-the-bernama-ceos-counter-arguments-against-my-claims/>

pattern where these benefits are either absent, lasted only until the media organisation downsized or lost when there were mergers and acquisitions³².

The precarious conditions of work can potentially result in financial insecurity and persistent anxiety, leading to high turnover or possible under-performance, especially for those with no other financial support system. Precarity is now a reality for media workers and is expected to accelerate even more in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Media owners' revenue has been severely impacted since the emergence of COVID-19, and the media ecosystem could become a stressful workplace, especially for new or junior media workers with low and delayed salary disbursements.

Ultimately, if the precarious work conditions highlighted above continue to be unresolved, the quality of news and broadcast production are likely to be impacted, thus undermining the independence and sustainability of the media industry.

In a meeting with the Chair of Bernama Ras Adiba Radzi on 4 November 2022 the following recommendations were discussed and possible solutions were explored together with the Chair:

- 1: Conduct an immediate investigation and publicly disclose the findings on the matters related to Sydney's allegations and related State responses.
- 2: Review and upscale the current employment and contractual practices amongst media agencies, especially state media agencies run on public funds.
- 3: Recognise the critical role of multi-lingual media and ensure that the various vernacular desks are adequately resourced and staffed.
- 4: Move forward with the establishment of the Malaysian Media Council as a transparent and independent self-regulatory body for the industry.

³² Meetings were held with other journalists in August and September 2022. The testimonies were shared in confidence and the journalists had requested anonymity due to fear of possible reprisals.

3. Media Under Attack

a. Use of Repressive Laws

Freedom of the press in Malaysia is widely restricted by repressive laws and actions by the government. Legislations such as the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1972, the Sedition Act 1948 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998 continue to be utilised arbitrarily to limit critical media reporting.

Malaysia is in the process of tabling a right to information (RTI) law that would allow the media to conduct factual and accurate reporting. However, the enactment of the RTI law should come together with repealing laws that would restrict reporting as well as freedom of press and expression in the country, specifically the Official Secrets Act (1972) and Section 203A of the Penal Code.

Common legislative laws used to restrict media freedom in Malaysia

<p><i>Section 233, Communications and Multimedia Act 1998</i></p>	<p><i>Prohibits the posting of offensive content online with the intent to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass.</i></p> <p><i>The section has a broad and extremely subjective definition of “improper use of network facilities or network services”, criminalising “obscene”, “indecent”, “false”, “menacing” or “offensive content.</i></p>
<p><i>Sedition Act 1948</i></p>	<p><i>Criminalises anything of a “seditious tendency” without requiring proof of intent, including exciting disaffection against the Ruler, to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different races or classes and to question any matter relating to the use of Malay as the official language and the special position of the Malays and natives of Sabah and Sarawak.</i></p> <p><i>What is “seditious” is extremely vague and open to subjective interpretation of words such as “hatred”, “contempt” and “discontent”.</i></p>
<p><i>Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984</i></p>	<p><i>Licences required for publishing a newspaper which is issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs.</i></p>

	<p><i>The law gives wide powers to the Home Minister to curtail news and content published. The licence can be revoked or suspended by the Home Ministry which can issue show cause letters to the publisher to justify why action should not be taken against them. The Act also allows for banning of books and other publications.</i></p>
<p>Official Secrets Act 1972</p>	<p><i>Criminalises the dissemination of information classified as an official “secret”.</i></p> <p><i>Allows any document to be classified as secret; with no requirement for harm and without requiring any relation to national security, international relations, or defence.</i></p> <p><i>No time limits for documents classified secret and the Act ousts the court’s jurisdiction to review the classification of the document.</i></p>
<p>Section 203A, Penal Code</p>	<p><i>An offence to disclose any information obtained in the performance of any duties or functions any written law attracting a fine of up to RM1 million and imprisonment for up to one year.</i></p>
<p>Section 500, Penal Code</p>	<p><i>Criminalises defamation.</i></p>
<p>Section 504, Penal Code</p>	<p><i>Criminalises “intentional insults with intent to provoke a breach of the peace”. The law is used to criminalise all “insults”, including legitimate and necessary comments for upholding democracy and ensuring accountability.</i></p>
<p>Section 505, Penal Code</p>	<p><i>Criminalises statements “conducting to mischief”. The law criminalises the making of misleading or false statements or misinformation.</i></p>
<p>Section 114A, Evidence Act</p>	<p><i>An Internet user is deemed the publisher of any online content unless proven otherwise. It also makes individuals and those who administer,</i></p>

	<i>operate, or provide spaces for online community forums, blogging and hosting services, liable for content published through their services.</i>
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Similar to 2021, an alarming number of cases on harassment of journalists and media organisations by authorities were recorded in 2022, including being summoned by the police for investigations over their work. Reporters have been called up by authorities as either targets of investigations or witnesses in ongoing investigations.

CIJ considers such actions as harassment and intimidation tactics that are aimed to silence and cause fear among journalists, hence hindering them from carrying out their duty of reporting the news freely.

The following is a list of journalists harassed in 2022, alongside a brief summary of each case³³.

- In April 2022, Court of Appeal Judge Mohd Nazlan Mohd Ghazali filed a police report against [Malaysia Today](#) claiming that the news article reporting that he was being probed for money transferred into his bank account was false and made with the malicious intent to undermine his credibility as an Appeals Court judge³⁴.

The Chief Registrar’s Office of the Federal Court said a police report was filed so an investigation could be conducted under Section 233 of the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 and Section 500 of the Penal Code.

- In July 2022, police issued a “wanted for questioning” alert on veteran British journalist [Nick Kochan](#). The alert was issued immediately after The Asia Times’ freelance journalist published an article on an interview with United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) Vice President Mohammad Hasan. The politician had claimed that some of his remarks regarding former Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak related to the 1MDB scandal were taken out of context³⁵.

³³ The summary for each case can be referred to CIJ’s FOE Watch on Twitter and Instagram.

³⁴ Bernama, “Court of Appeal judge lodges police report against Malaysia Today,” *The Malaysian Reserve*, 21 April 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2022/04/21/court-of-appeal-judge-lodges-police-report-against-malaysia-today/>

³⁵ The Sarawak Report, “Knee-Jerk Attempts at Intimidation Make Malaysia Ridiculous Once More,” *The Sarawak report*, 22 July, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.sarawakreport.org/2022/07/knee-jerk-attempts-at-intimidation-make-malaysia-ridiculous-once-more>

Investigations on this case were under Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 and Section 505 (b) of the Penal Code.

- On 1 September 2022, UMNO issued a Letter of Demand (LOD) to two media outlets, [Malaysiakini and Astro Awani](#), over allegedly defamatory reports on the party. The LOD included demands for a retraction, written apology, and compensation of RM25 million from the two media organisations, respectively³⁶.
- On 13 September 2022, [Ahmad Azam Mohd Aris](#), the former editor-in-chief of The Edge Communications Sdn Bhd, was charged with two counts of criminal defamation against a Malaysian businessman and four firms in connection with two news articles on alleged penny stocks manipulation in 2020 and 2021³⁷.
- On 6 October 2022, police initiated an investigation regarding the investigation report of former attorney-general [Tommy Thomas'](#) memoir 'My Story: Justice in the Wilderness' which was disclosed on the news portal, Malaysia Today. The investigation into the website was conducted in accordance with Section 8 of the Official Secrets Act, Section 203A of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998³⁸.
- On 19 October 2022, [New Straits Times \(NST\) chief editor Farrah Naz Karim](#) was interrogated by the police over an article published by the news daily regarding an alleged Mossad operation in Kuala Lumpur to kidnap a Palestinian national. It was reported that Farrah was questioned by the authorities for more than three hours³⁹.

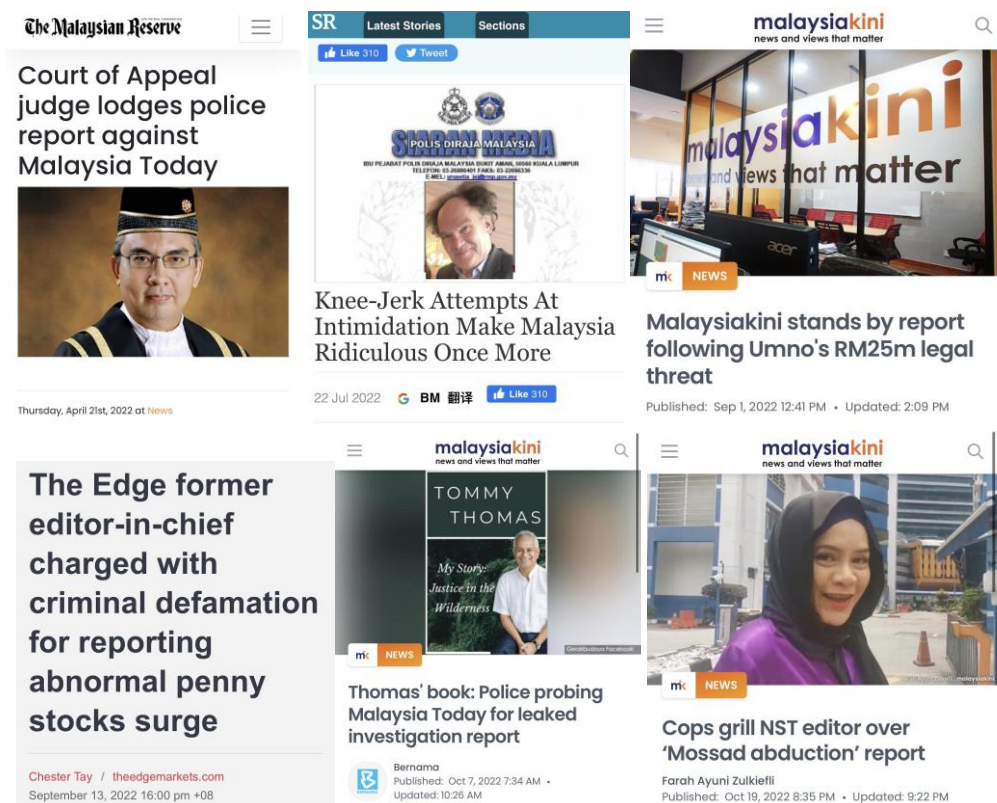
Farrah said in a statement that the police wanted to know how NST had obtained information on the kidnapping and its connection to Mossad. Farrah also made it clear that they 'will not be intimidated by the police as producing detailed reports is part and parcel of investigative journalism'.

³⁶ Malaysiakini, "Malaysiakini stands by report following Umno's RM25m legal threat," *MalaysiaKini*, 1 September, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/634194>

³⁷ Chester Tay, "The Edge former editor-in-chief charged with criminal defamation for reporting abnormal penny stocks surge," *The Edge Markets*, 13 September, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.theedgemarkets.com/article/edge-former-editorinchief-charged-criminal-defamation-reporting-abnormal-penny-stocks-surge>

³⁸ Bernama, "Thomas' book: Police probing Malaysia Today for leaked investigation report," *MalaysiaKini*, 7 October 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/638537>

³⁹ Farah Ayuni Zulkiefli, "Cops grill NST editor over 'Mossad abduction' report," *MalaysiaKini*, 19 October 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/640303>



Articles reporting the cases listed above⁴⁰

This trend of using repressive laws on the media continues in 2023.

It is noted that oftentimes, the news stories that have garnered attention from authorities are those that highlight the short-comings of the government.

b. Issues on Media Access and Safety of Media Workers

i. Media Access

CIJ noted several restrictions in terms of media access to certain events in 2022. Some of these restrictions were reportedly due to COVID-19 standard operating procedure (SOP) violations. For example, Gerakan Media Merdeka (GERAMM) stated that [media covering the Johor state elections](#) in early 2022 were fined for allegedly failing to comply with physical confinement SOP⁴¹. This incident had taken place in the Larkin constituency.

⁴⁰ From left to right, top to bottom these are screen grabs of articles from [The Malaysian Reserve](#), [Sarawak Report](#), [Malaysiakini on UMNO's legal threat](#), [The Edge](#), [Malaysiakini article on Tommy Thomas' biography](#), and [Malaysiakini article on investigation on New Straits Times editor](#).

⁴¹ Alyaa Alhadjri, "Calon, kumpulan wartawan gesa beri akses buat liputan PRN" *Malaysiakini*, 26 February 2022, [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://m.malaysiakini.com/news/612204>

Another incident on media access in government/public establishments involved two reporters from [The Vibes](#) experiencing verbal intimidation and threats at the immigration office Urban Transformation Centre (UTC) Pudu. This incident occurred in May 2022, where a guard yelled at the reporters despite them identifying themselves as media⁴².

Several incidences of restriction in media access were reported in the lead up to the 15th General Election (GE15). This includes the incident involving media personnel covering the [Bidor Chikus Forest Reserve helicopter crash](#) in Ipoh. Media were prevented from approaching the Raja Permaisuri Bainun Hospital Forensic Department in September, 2022⁴³.

CIJ has noted an improvement in media access to events this year since the 15th General Elections.

ii. Safety of Media Workers

The physical safety of media workers has always been a point of concern while on duty. Safety of media workers may vary, depending on the risks of the media coverage and this would include sexual harassment and physical violence.

In a training session conducted by CIJ and GERAMM, journalists, especially women, had raised concerns related to sexual harassment, including being touched inappropriately while attending press conferences and protests. The discussions often circulated back to women reporters expressing self-doubt and second-guessing if the touches were intentional. The fear of not being believed also contributed to women journalists not disclosing it to their colleagues or superiors as they focus on their story.

The Human Rights Council expressed concern about the unique risks faced by women journalists in its resolution 51/9 on "The safety of journalists" adopted on 6 October 2022. It also emphasised the significance of taking a gender-responsive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists, including in the online sphere, to effectively tackle gender-based discrimination, including sexual and gender-based violence and threats. This is critical to enable

⁴² The Vibes News, Twitter post, 14 May 2022, 12.04p.m.,

<https://twitter.com/thevibesnews/status/1525326258577387520?s=21&t=B3aq5W-XwDKWzoBxbF1RdA>

⁴³ Balqis Jazimah Zahari, "Kecoh media dihalang buat liputan di Jabatan Forensik HRPB" *Harian Metro*, 19 September 2022, [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023]

<https://www.hmetro.com.my/amp/mutakhir/2022/09/883438/kecoh-media-dihalang-buat-liputan-di-jabatan-forensik-hrpb>

women to enter and remain in journalism, while ensuring their greatest possible safety, and ensuring that the experiences and concerns of women journalists are effectively addressed.

Another common worry regarding physical safety focuses on being targeted by authorities for reporting or while on duty. An example would include being apprehended while covering protests or targeted by the authorities under repressive laws.

Moreover, concerns on digital security are often tied to physical safety as journalists and media workers may be tracked online via apps such as Grab and TouchNGo, where personal data like location are easily accessible. Although Malaysian media are not surveilled by authorities as is its neighbours in the Philippines and Indonesia, journalists are still aware of such possibilities as means to report safely without being compromised.

Use of restrictive laws to silence the media and the emergence of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), including by business entities, to exert pressure, intimidate or deplete the resources and exhaust the morale of journalists, thereby preventing them from carrying out their work or leading to self-censorship, poses an alarming challenge to the independence of media in upholding their critical role in providing impartial, timely and ethical reporting on matters of public interest.

4. 15th General Elections Media Reporting

CIJ embarked on a Social Media Monitoring Project for GE15 in October and November 2022. Malaysia's 15th General Elections saw a rise in hate speech and disinformation, especially in narratives involving issues such as race and religion, gender, LGBTIQ, refugees and migrants. This project monitored the Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube accounts of sixteen Malaysia media organisations.

1. <i>Berita Harian Online</i>	2. <i>Sinar Harian Online</i>	3. <i>Astro Awani Online</i>	4. <i>Sin Chew Daily</i>
5. <i>Utusan Malaysia Online</i>	6. <i>Malaysiakini</i>	7. <i>Oriental Daily</i>	8. <i>The Star Online</i>
9. <i>Harakah</i>	10. <i>NST Online</i>	11. <i>Bernama.com</i>	12. <i>Borneo Post</i>
13. <i>BFM89.9</i>	14. <i>Dayak Daily</i>	15. <i>Rocket</i>	16. <i>The Merdeka Times</i>

Hate rhetoric surrounding these issues is nothing new during election campaigns by politicians and political parties. However, CIJ, through the Social Media Monitoring Initiative noted several instances in which the media had amplified these narratives.

a. Reporting on Race and Religion

Early in the election campaign period, broadcast station [AwesomeTV](#) released a segment using racial tones to prompt Malaysian Malay voters to vote during Polling Day on 19 November by stoking fear of being overrun by Malaysian Chinese voters. Following the release of the video segment, the broadcast station defended its take on motivating a larger Malay voter turnout in order to limit the political power gained by other ethnicities in Malaysia, especially by amplifying racist undertones against Malaysian Chinese voters⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ Zarrah Morden, "Awesome TV says 'not racist', just telling Malays to vote or new govt won't care for their welfare," *Malay Mail*, 6 November, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023]

These racial rhetoric and narratives were overwhelmingly used by politicians in Perikatan Nasional in order to stop Pakatan Harapan, primarily the Democratic Action Party (DAP) from gaining political power during the elections. Amplification of such divisive rhetoric by the media is alarming as this questions the integrity of information reported during elections and incites fear and unrest amongst a Malaysian multiracial electorate.

Civil society organisations and other media houses had called out AwesomeTV for reporting the segment and such actions did indeed provide a sense of checks and balances in election reporting.

MALAYSIA

Awesome TV says 'not racist', just telling Malays to vote or new govt won't care for their welfare



[online](#)

b. Xenophobia against the Refugee and Migrant Communities

Migrants and refugees have also been negatively portrayed during the period of the election campaigns. Although the number of posts regarding migrants and refugees were small compared to other issues monitored, it recorded the highest number in severity of hate speech.

<https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2022/11/06/awesome-tv-says-not-racist-just-telling-malays-to-vote-or-new-govt-wont-care-for-their-welfare/37855>

It was noted during this time that the high severity levels of hate speech were comments under posts made by government agencies and in some incidences, articles posted by media on their social media accounts⁴⁵. For example, an interview by [Klang MP Ganabatirau](#) where he spoke about migrant workers in the Meru Market had contained xenophobic and anti-migrant sentiment⁴⁶.



[online](#)⁴⁷

c. Misogynistic Tropes against Women Candidates

Similar to previous election cycles, GE15 saw an abysmal percentage of women candidates nominated. This is under the 30% mark of women representation in leadership roles pushed by the previous government.

During the election campaign, two mainstream media outlets were called out for perpetuating sexist tones by focusing on physical attributes of female candidates standing for election. Female candidates such as Young Syefura Othman (Pakatan Harapan - Bentong), Nur Fathiah Syazwana Shaharuddin (Independent - Batu), Jo-Anna Sue Henley Rampas (Warisan - Tuaran) were described by the media houses using terms such as “jelitawan” and “beauty with brains”⁴⁸.

Such instances of gender stereotyping and sexism used as sensationalising and reporting female

⁴⁵ Information and data regarding this topic can be found in CIJ’s GE15 Monitoring Research report, which will be launched soon.

⁴⁶ Zainah, “Klang banyak peniaga warga asing, banteras segera! – Ganabatirau,” *SelangorTV*, 6 November, 2022. [online] [Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://selangortv.my/klang-banyak-peniaga-warga-asing-banteras-segera-ganabatirau/>

⁴⁷ Ibid. *SelangorTV*.

⁴⁸ FMT reporters, “Coalition calls out media for focusing on female candidates’ looks,” *Free Malaysia Today*, 9 November, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/11/09/coalition-calls-out-media-for-focusing-on-female-candidates-looks/>

candidates draws voters' attention from their capabilities and leadership qualities. Propping up female candidates as one-dimensional figures who are reported for their physical attractiveness rather than their expertise, credentials and issues championed by them enforces the trope of the "male gaze" by the media.

These incidents of reporting on potential women leaders in Malaysia can be dangerous and insidious as it influences voters to perceive female candidates as less credible or not equipped for public office. This reinforces the importance of having more women in leadership roles in order to counter these misogynistic and sexist tropes.

Having more female leaders in public office and the political sphere will not only cause positive impact for change on the nation's laws and policies, but it will inspire substantive gender equality in Malaysia for generations to come. The role of the media in portraying women, especially female leaders is essential.



⁴⁹ FMT reporters, "Coalition calls out media for focusing on female candidates' looks," *Free Malaysia Today*, 9 November, 2022. [online][Accessed on 3 May 2023] <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/11/09/coalition-calls-out-media-for-focusing-on-female-candidates-looks/>

5. Social Inclusiveness and Media Reporting

It is vital that Malaysia practises inclusivity as a diverse society consisting of multiple races, religions, and social backgrounds. However, in recent years the media has portrayed a different side to the country which is not as tolerant to different moral values, beliefs, way of life and opinions.

As Malaysia becomes more polarised, a balanced and responsible reporting is crucial in ensuring that the media is analytical, generates and disseminates healthy discourse, and lends its voice and power to fight against discrimination and inequality.

The media and especially journalists have a fundamental role in producing news and stories that contain accurate facts and unbiased perspectives. This is vital in informing both policy and societal opinion regarding marginalised or at-risk communities. It follows that they should refrain from sensationalising and perpetuating information that could lead to further discrimination and injustices against marginalised and vulnerable communities.

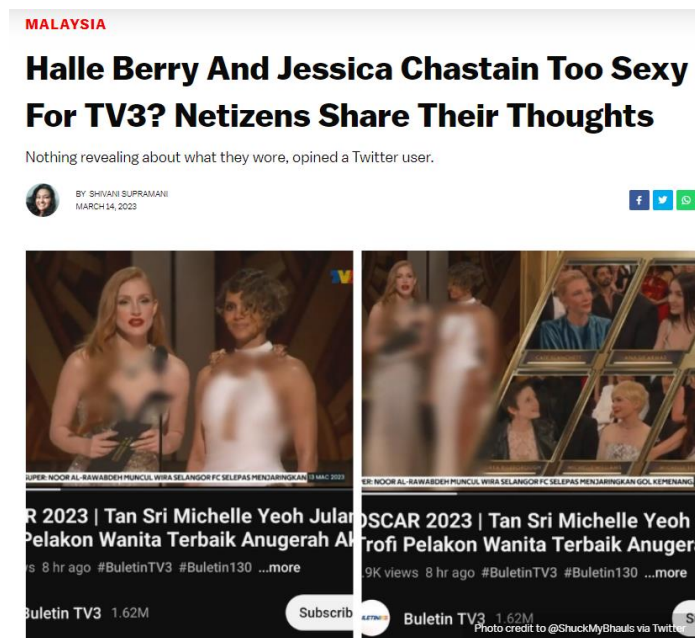
Unfortunately, Malaysian media is often guilty of perpetuating unethical headlines and reports in pursuit of increased viewership and relevance among present-day digital audiences.

a. Gender Reporting

Media reporting covering women has always been borderline unethical and unfair in Malaysia, with most reports side-lining women and women's issues. A recent example of such cases would be the coverage of female candidates in GE15, which contained misogynist and sexist undertones by completely undermining the capabilities of women leaders.

Women covered by the media are often either sexualised or censored in reporting. One instance would be the coverage of the 2023 Oscars by [Buletin TV3](#)⁵⁰, where actresses Halle Berry and Jessica Chastain had their bodies blurred, with only their faces visible while announcing an award. The blurring of their bodies was due to their dresses, which may have been deemed revealing by some parties.

⁵⁰ Shivani Supramani, "Halle Berry And Jessica Chastain Too Sexy For TV3? Netizens Share Their Thoughts" The Rakyat Post, 14 March 2023 [online] Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2023/03/14/halle-berry-and-jessica-chastain-too-sexy-for-tv3-netizens-share-their-thoughts/>



[online](#)⁵¹

Communities-at-risk like the LGBTIQ groups have always borne unethical gender reporting that veered towards sensationalism, moral policing as well as social and religious conformity. These instances of reporting have reinforced negative stereotypes on these groups and have even culminated in a case that emboldened hate speech by the public, such as the crackdown on the LGBTIQ community at RexKL in October 2022.

On the night of 29 October, guests at the Halloween private party 'Shagrilla' were raided by the police and the Federal Territory Islamic Religious Department (JAWI) and the police. Transpeople were subjected to heavy intimidation and harassment by the authorities, 20 muslims were brought to JAWI's office, where they were detained, including drag queens who were cross-dressing in their Halloween costumes and transwomen. Tweets and TikTok posts about the raid went viral, and it triggered a slew of hate speech online towards the LGBTIQ+ community. Not only netizens began to spread hate but notable religious figures as well.

⁵¹ Shivani Supramani, "Halle Berry And Jessica Chastain Too Sexy For TV3? Netizens Share Their Thoughts" The Rakyat Post, 14 March 2023 [online] Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2023/03/14/halle-berry-and-jessica-chastain-too-sexy-for-tv3-netizens-share-their-thoughts/>

NEWS

"It Was Traumatizing" – PDRM & JAWI Raid Private Drag Queen Halloween Party At REXKL

Over 20 individuals were arrested including transwomen and drag queens.

By Aqasha Nur'aiman — 31 Oct 2022, 05:58 PM — Updated 6 months ago



#news #drag #transgender #transgenderwoman #GII #GII #PDRM #jawi #queen



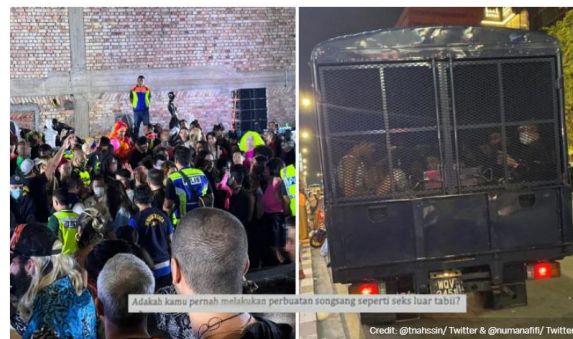
Cover image via Provided to SAYS & @NumanAffi (Twitter)

[online](#)⁵²

Raided RexKL Guests Allegedly Subjected To Demeaning Questions And Poor Treatment By Authorities

Activist Numan Affi shared two pictures of the form that subjected those arrested with personal and humiliating questions.

BY ADELINE LEONG
NOVEMBER 1, 2022



[online](#)⁵³

Media coverage of this raid and the public debate surrounding it had mainly taken place on social media, which led to an increase of hateful rhetoric targeting LGBTQI persons at the party as well as in general. Most media coverage surrounding the raid had demonstrated language that was critical toward the mistreatment of those detained by authorities. The images displayed from the scene had included persons locked up in a truck. This added fuel to the sensationalism of the raid and flamed further outrage online. Reports by media on social media had amassed comments that condemned the LGBTQ+ community.

⁵² Aqasha Nur'aiman, "It Was Traumatizing – PDRM & JAWI Raid Private Drag Queen Halloween Party At REXKL" Says.com, 31 October 2022 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://says.com/my/news/it-was-traumatizing-pdrm-jawi-raided-a-private-drag-queen-halloween-party-at-rexkl>

⁵³ Adeline Leong. "Raided RexKL Guests Allegedly Subjected To Demeaning Questions And Poor Treatment By Authorities" The Rakyat Post, 1 November 2022 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2022/11/01/raided-rexkl-guests-allegedly-subjected-to-demeaning-questions-and-poor-treatment-by-authorities/>



[online](#)⁵⁴

b. Suicide Reporting

Media reporting on deaths that are suspected suicides has always been on the brink of sensationalism and highlights the lack of empathy. Oftentimes, deaths with no cause indicated or with suspicious circumstances would trigger reader curiosity and are dramatized in the news.

Sensational headlines and uncensored photos of the deceased are still unfortunately used by the media when covering such cases. This can be dangerous as it romanticizes the idea of suicide without looking into the complexities surrounding it, especially on mental health.

Positive Instances

- Most coverage on suicide have improved in terms of images used. Recent reports recorded by CIJ have used [vague](#)⁵⁵ images or [photographs of the Commissioners](#)⁵⁶ investigating the case.

⁵⁴ NewsBFM Twitter [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023]
<https://twitter.com/NewsBFM/status/1586405024279990273?s=20&t=X27x8ALFt9DqqB7BoozsIQ>

⁵⁵ “Sarjan polis maut tertembak diri sendiri”, Kosmo, 19 February 2023 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023]
<https://www.kosmo.com.my/2023/02/19/sarjan-polis-maut-tertembak-diri-sendiri/>

⁵⁶ Nizam Zain “Kerana cinta ditolak, seorang wanita cuba terjun dari tingkat 14 Kompleks PKNS”, MalaysiaGazette, 2 April 2023 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023]
<https://malaysiagazette.com/2023/04/02/kerana-cinta-ditolak-seorang-wanita-cuba-terjun-dari-tingkat-14-kompleks-pkns/>

- Free Malaysia Today (FMT) provided a real-life experience of a person struggling with their mental health and suicide ideation in an [article](#)⁵⁷, which had humanised the issue. Moreover, this [article](#)⁵⁸ by Free Malaysia Today (FMT) provides a simple but comprehensive and effective guide on mental health and suicide.

Suicide prevention: how you can help

In 2019, Malaysia recorded a rate of 5.8 per 100,000 population, with an estimated 1,841 deaths, or about five a day.

DOC2US - 17 Sep 2022, 8:30am

24
Shares



Share



Tweet



Share



Email



Help is available for those who might be contemplating ending their lives, as well as those who know someone who is suicidal. (Ervato Elements pic)

World Suicide Prevention Day has been held annually on Sept 10 since 2003. Symbolised by a yellow ribbon, the day is commemorated to raise awareness on suicide prevention, remove stigma, and promote informed action to tackle this ever-increasing public health issue.

In 2019, Malaysia recorded a suicide rate of 5.8 per 100,000 population, with an estimated 1,841 deaths, or about five a day.

Screengrab from [online](#)⁵⁹

Negative Instances

- Headlines that report the death of a famous person who has died under unknown circumstances often mention that person may have committed suicide. Examples of these instances are “[Cikgu Tuisyen Mati Disyaki Bunuh Diri](#)”⁶⁰ and “[Bintang TikTok India Ditemui Mati Dipercayai Bunuh Diri](#)”⁶¹.

⁵⁷ Zeanaaima Mohd Yusof “Suicidal thoughts don’t vanish in jail”, Free Malaysia Today 9 July 2022 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/07/09/suicidal-thoughts-dont-vanish-in-jail/>

⁵⁸ DOC2US “Suicide prevention: how you can help”, Free Malaysia Today, 17 September 2022 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/leisure/2022/09/17/suicide-prevention-how-you-can-help/>

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Nor Aziah Mat Noh “Cikgu tuisyen mati disyaki bunuh diri” Kosmo, 8 Ogos 2022 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.kosmo.com.my/2022/08/08/cikgu-tuisyen-mati-disyaki-bunuh-diri/>

⁶¹ Agency, “Bintang TikTok India ditemui mati, dipercayai bunuh diri” Astro Awani, 26 June 2020 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-dunia/bintang-tiktok-india-ditemui-mati-dipercayai-bunuh-diri-248825>

- Another instance would include headlines or reporting content that highlight the way an individual has committed suicide. An example of this would be “[Kerana Cinta Ditolak Seorang Wanita Cuba Terjun Dari Tingkat 14 Kompleks PKNS](#)”⁶². Highlighting such details in the headlines alongside sensational language may incur copy-cat cases of suicide.
- Moreover, graphic images of items of the deceased, such as clothes worn by the deceased have been used in the coverage of suicide story. [One instance](#)⁶³ would include images of clothes worn and weapons used to kill the mother of a person who had committed suicide. Although, the items were not those of the person who had committed suicide, they were still things of an individual believed to be murdered by the person.
- Most reporting on suicide still by-and-large did not include [appropriate support helplines](#)⁶⁴ contacts in the articles. Although some articles by Free Malaysia Today like those listed above had provided information on helplines, some articles do not contain such information like this [article](#)⁶⁵.



⁶² Nizam Zain “Kerana cinta ditolak, seorang wanita cuba terjun dari tingkat 14 Kompleks PKNS”, MalaysiaGazette, 2 April 2023 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://malaysiagazette.com/2023/04/02/kerana-cinta-ditolak-seorang-wanita-cuba-terjun-dari-tingkat-14-kompleks-pkns/>

⁶³ Agency, “Bunuh diri selepas tikam ibu sedang tadarus di masjid”, Utusan Malaysia, 31 Mac 2023 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.utusan.com.my/luar-negara/2023/03/bunuh-diri-selepas-tikam-ibu-sedang-tadarus-di-masjid/>

⁶⁴ CIJ, “Guidelines on Ethical and Responsible Reporting on Suicide” <https://cijmalaysia.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PDF-GUIDELINES-ON-ETHICAL-AND-RESPONSIBLE-REPORTING-ON-SUICIDE-.pdf.pdf>

⁶⁵ Staff reporters, “Cops to investigate schoolboy who tried to hurt himself” Free Malaysia Today, 18 April 2023 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/04/18/cops-to-investigate-schoolboy-who-tried-to-hurt-himself/>

The [decriminalisation of suicide or attempted suicide](#)⁶⁶ is definitely a step in the right direction for the country in addressing issues surrounding mental health. This would remove the stigma surrounding mental health and suicide in the country and in turn help individuals with these struggles. Most importantly, media coverage on suicide and mental health should be kinder, without demonising and victim-blaming individuals as the media are able to help the narrative surrounding these issues in social settings as well as politically.

c. Moral Policing

The issue of moral policing is nothing new in Malaysia, however CIJ has seen a rise in such instances in the last few months. It was evident in the instances surrounding dress codes for individuals as they accessed public facilities such the police station, hospital, and such.

Women are mostly the targets of such instances of moral policing, with images of them being reprimanded in their attire used in articles. Moreover, the repeated use of the phrase 'denied entry' in the headlines alongside words like 'shorts', 'dress' and 'attire' would influence the way people dress by conforming to a certain dress code.

Hemline hiccup: Woman denied entry to police station after being told not wearing 'proper attire'

By MAHADHIR MONIHULDIN

NATION

Monday, 13 Mar 2023
11:17 AM MYT



'Unsuitably dressed' woman denied entry into SSM office

By MANJIT KAUR

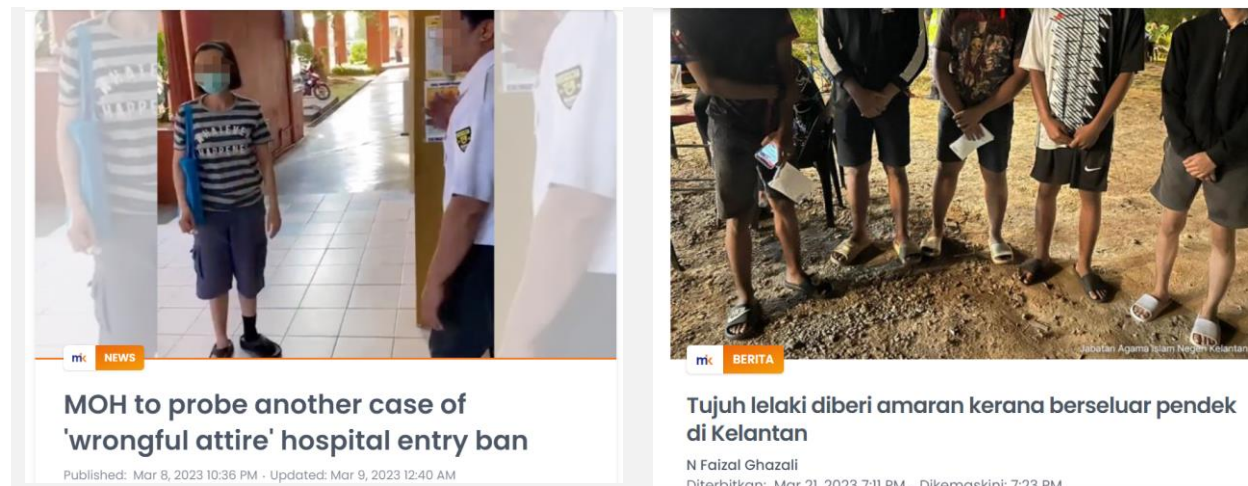
NATION

Saturday, 11 Mar 2023



Seeking an explanation: Khor speaking to a SSM staff member after she was denied entry into the office in Ipoh.

⁶⁶ Reuters, "Malaysia seeks to decriminalise suicide attempts", 4 April 2023 [online] [Accessed 2 May 2023] <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/malaysia-seeks-decriminalise-suicide-attempts-2023-04-04/#:~:text=The%20announcement%20comes%20a%20day,year%2C%20fined%2C%20or%20both>



online⁶⁷

d. Censorship and limitations on artistic freedoms

In recent years, the country has seen limitations being put on artistic expression, namely in the banning of movies. The appointment of the new government had brought a wave of optimism that such instances of censorship would scale down. However, since November 2022, the trend of threatening to ban films has continued with the instances of 'Pulau' and 'Mentega Terbang'.

The media coverage of 'Pulau' had begun with the release of the trailer that had attracted controversy due to certain scenes that were deemed 'sexual'. This coverage had escalated with the media sensationalising headlines on not only the contents of the trailer but rather focusing on opinions of politicians, key opinion leaders and augmented public debate on the film before its release. Shortly after the release of the trailer, The Minister of Communications and Digital, YB Fahmi Fadzil had criticised the alleged 'sexual' nature of the film. This had caused a ripple effect, resulting in the banning of the film in Terengganu.

⁶⁷ Images are screen grabs of articles mentioned above.

Trailer for local supernatural thriller film, Pulau, gets flak online for steamy scenes, sexy outfits (VIDEO)



Malaysian supernatural thriller film Pulau will be hitting cinemas this March 9. — Picture via Instagram/ PulauMovie.

Follow us on [Instagram](#), subscribe to our [Telegram](#) channel and [browser alerts](#) for the latest news you need to know.

By Arif Zikri
Tuesday, 17 Jan 2023 1:28 PM MYT

[online](#)⁶⁸

'Pulau' producer says 10 scenes had to be cut from film for PG-13 rating

By ANNDREA A. WEBBER



ENTERTAINMENT
Wednesday, 01 Mar 2023
12:00 PM MYT

Related News



ENTERTAINMENT 6h ago
Michelle Yeoh to headline new Star Trek movie 'Star Trek:...



Producer Fred Chong and the stars of the movie hope the public will change its mind about the misconceptions surrounding 'Pulau' as it is a film 'filled with powerful messages'. Photos: Handout

[online](#)⁶⁹

The next film to receive criticism and reignite public debate on film censorship was 'Mentega Terbang'. The film centres around the curiosity of a young woman questioning her faith in her religion, Islam, in the context of grief and the loss of a loved one. This had caused an uproar amongst PAS politicians and some Muslim key opinion leaders.

Positive Instances

The outcry against 'Mentega Terbang' had brought about much criticism from commentators and academics, who have voiced their concerns of the censoring of the film.

⁶⁸ Arif Zikri, "Trailer for local supernatural thriller film, Pulau, gets flak online for steamy scenes, sexy outfits" Malay Mail, 17 January 2023 [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.malaymail.com/news/showbiz/2023/01/17/trailer-for-local-supernatural-thriller-film-pulau-gets-flak-online-for-steamly-scenes-sexy-outfits-video/50663>

⁶⁹ Anndrea A. Webber, "'Pulau' producer says 10 scenes had to be cut from film for PG-13 rating" The Star, 1 March 2023 [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/entertainment/2023/03/01/039pulau039-producer-says-10-scenes-had-to-be-cut-from-film-for-pg-13-rating>

Those who fear other religions 'spiritually weak', says academic

Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi of UCSJ University was commenting on Selangor's move to prohibit Muslims from attending programmes in non-Muslim houses of worship.

Tsubasa Nair - 16 Mar 2023, 9:34pm

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Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi said he has attended celebrations and events in other houses of faith without any issues.

[online](#)⁷⁰

WHAT YOU THINK

The rising threat of the treacherous triad: Super elites, hardcore racial bigots and extreme religious zealots — Rais Hussin

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Saturday, 18 Mar 2023 3:26 PM MYT

MARCH 18 — The political heat is rising, combusting on racial and religious fuel to such an alarming level that is bad enough for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to order the security forces to be on alert.

[online](#)⁷¹

Negative Instances

Headlines that include active verbs such as '[Ambil Tindakan Tegas Terhadap Pembikin Filem Mentega Terbang](#)'⁷² are concerning as such rhetoric may incite targeted violence against an individual.

⁷⁰ Tsubasa Nair, "Those who fear other religions 'spiritually weak', says academic" Free Malaysia Today 16 March 2023 [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/03/16/those-who-fear-other-religions-are-weak-in-their-own-faith-says-academic/>

⁷¹ Rais Hussin, "The rising threat of the treacherous triad: Super elites, hardcore racial bigots and extreme religious zealots", Malay Mail, 18 March 2023 [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2023/03/18/the-rising-threat-of-the-treacherous-triad-super-elites-hardcore-racial-bigots-and-extreme-religious-zealots-rai-hussin/60320>

⁷² Mohd Nasaruddin Parzi, "Ambil tindakan tegas terhadap pembikin filem Mentega Terbang", Berita Harian, 6 March, 2023 [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://www.bharian.com.my/berita/nasional/2023/03/1073111/ambil-tindakan-tegas-terhadap-pembikin-filem-mentega-terbang>

Ambil tindakan tegas terhadap pembikin filem Mentega Terbang

Oleh Mohd Nasaruddin Parzi - Mac 6, 2023 @ 3:37pm
bhnews@bh.com.my



[online](#)⁷³



[online](#)⁷⁴

⁷³ ibid.

⁷⁴ Nizam Zain, "Haramkan filem Mentega Terbang, promosi pluralisme – Ibrahim Ali", Malaysia Gazette, 27 February 2023 [online] [Accessed on 2 May 2023] <https://malysiagazette.com/2023/02/27/haramkan-filem-mentega-terbang-promosi-pluralisme-ibrahim-ali/>

6. Recommendations

Recommendations to the State

A newly elected Prime Minister and unity government has brought about much optimism and political stability to some degree. This government has made promises through their Manifesto to ensure Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Malaysia. Nevertheless, CIJ calls on the State to undertake the following:

a. Guarantee equal access to all media

Unrestricted media access must be a guarantee regardless of affiliation, medium of practice or geographical locations. There should be no arbitrary or discriminatory restrictions of media access to government press conferences, events, elections, public hearings, court, Parliament, state assemblies and official visits regardless if media are not state owned.

b. Stop using repressive laws against the media

This would include placing an immediate moratorium on the use of repressive laws like the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1972, the Sedition Act 1948 and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) 1998, and proceeding with an urgent review to either amend or repeal said laws. Proceeding this way will also go beyond the usual rhetoric or promises made by politicians before this and realise media reforms and a commitment to uphold our constitutional rights.

c. Set up the Malaysian Media Council (MMC)

CIJ recognises the current government's push for setting up the Malaysian Media Council by acknowledging the work of the Pro-Tem Committee. It is vital that the government continues to prioritise the establishment of a transparent and independent self-regulatory body for the industry. Having a media council in place will ensure responsible and inclusive reporting through the publication of guidelines to promote inclusive reporting on social areas, and reduce the political and commercial influences on media content.

d. Commitments to Improve Labour Rights for Media Workers

CIJ calls for the establishment of an independent taskforce that would investigate the economic and financial limitations to the infrastructure of the media industry by conducting consultations

with the National Union of Journalists Malaysia, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and media practitioners. Moreover, the State should also promote the importance of establishing unions among media workers in various media organisations, be it state-owned, private, or independent.

e. Combat Disinformation and Mitigate Online Hate Speech

- i. Set up an independent multi-stakeholder commission to review the root causes of hate speech and to develop recommendations to combat hate speech in line with international standards, including the Rabat Plan of Action.
- ii. Collaborate with existing initiatives to improve independent inoculating measures and factcheck mechanisms, to effectively debunk false and misleading narratives before they become viral.
- iii. Focus on education and dissemination of public information countering the alleged mis/disinformation, and not merely on prosecution.
- iv. Engage with social media platforms and with multi-stakeholder experts, to strengthen the current social media standards and mechanisms to ensure effective response in situations of disinformation and hate speech.

This country has always experienced hate speech with regards to issues on Race, Religion and Royalty. Dangerous speech targeting groups-at-risk such as LGBTIQ persons, refugees and migrants have escalated in recent years due to the politicising the hate on these groups.

Recommendations to the media:

It is vital that the media, in their role as the fourth estate, should always attest to the standards of providing impartial, timely, and ethical reporting.

In this regard, CIJ and partners have produced resources for media on the following:

CIJ has produced the media checklist and election reporting guide, developed under the GE15 Rapid Response initiative in the hopes to assist the media in their reporting.

1. Elections FAQ: Race and Religion in Malaysia

Link: <https://cijmalaysia.net/elections-faq-race-and-religion-in-malaysia/>

2. Elections FAQ: Migrants and Refugees

Link: <https://cijmalaysia.net/elections-faq-migrants-and-refugees/>

3. Media Checklist and Elections Reporting Guide

Link: <https://cijmalaysia.net/election-monitoring/rapid-response/>

Link: <https://cijmalaysia.net/election-reporting-guide-for-the-media/>

4. Media Guide on Reporting Suicide

Link: <https://cijmalaysia.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/PDF-GUIDELINES-ON-ETHICAL-AND-RESPONSIBLE-REPORTING-ON-SUICIDE-.pdf.pdf>

5. Media Guide on Reporting Protests

Link⁷⁵: <https://cijmalaysia.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LAWAN-Protest-Monitoring-Report-AUG-2021.pdf>

⁷⁵ The protest guidelines can be found in Annexe 3 Guidelines for Media to Safely Cover Protests During COVID-19 on page 51 of the #Lawan Monitoring Report by CIJ, published in July 2021.

