



PRESS STATEMENT

3 May 2026

CIJ Commemorates World Press Freedom Day 2026 and Calls for the Protection of Media Workers' Rights

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) Malaysia commemorates and celebrates World Press Freedom Day (WPFDD) 2026 this 3 May. The Malaysian media has come a long way serving as the country's fourth estate, experiencing the same growing pains alongside Malaysia's democracy.

The passing of the Media Council Act in 2025 and the long-anticipated Freedom of Information Bill expected to be tabled soon marks a welcome progression in enabling press freedom. We therefore hope to see the continued strengthening of independent media and a self-regulated media ecosystem.

However, CIJ notes with concern Malaysia's recent drop in its score in the recent Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders (RSF): from 88th place to the 95th place globally. The fallen overall score (from 56.09 to 52.73) shows a concerning deterioration in the quality of media freedom locally, even amidst the overall worsening of press freedom globally.

The Malaysian media ecosystem remains fraught with pressures from various forces. Restrictive laws such as the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, Sedition Act 1948, various sections of the Penal Code, and Official Secrets Act 1972, are increasingly and consistently weaponised to silence the media. Moreover, CIJ notes the return of the use of the Printing Presses and Publications Act to crack down on the media, a trend not seen in recent years.

Recently, Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said that the media "[should be given full space to perform their duties](#)" after an incident where three journalists from a Chinese-language paper were instructed by the police to delete photos and videos taken while covering a riot at a karaoke centre. However, this principle is often difficult to translate into practice when the authorities regularly censor the media and bypass the Media Council by initiating direct action against media organisations and journalists. We have observed the repeated censorship of media coverage on public interest issues recently, such as the investigations on Malaysiakini journalist B Nantha Kumar and the lawsuits launched against media organisations covering alleged corruption. If this pattern of censorship and weaponising draconian laws to threaten media freedom persist, not only will it derail any trust in public interest reporting, but also make the Media Council, as a multistakeholder self-regulatory body redundant.

We also note the significant impact the deteriorating economic environment has on media workers' labour rights. This year, on 10 May 2026, CIJ will launch its annual Media Landscape Report and study the overall media ecosystem through the lens of the backbone of the media: journalists working on the ground. Media workers suffer from consistent economic pressures

and sustainability challenges in the form of low wages, severe job insecurity, intimidation and harassment both within newsrooms and out in the field, as well as unsustainably high-pressure working environments. The ecosystem is increasingly overtaken by digital transformation in the form of artificial intelligence (AI) adaptation, increasing proliferation of disinformation and erosion of trust in legitimate journalism, changing consumer patterns and behaviours, and political interference and manipulation of divisive narratives such as on the 3R (race, religion and royalty). This inevitably affects the larger media ecosystem, and journalism therefore suffers from a decline in the quality of its reporting, as well as a loss in the number of journalists committed to the cause of media freedom.

In light of these issues, CIJ, together with the Malaysian Media Council (MMC) and Gerakan Media Merdeka (GeramM) will be hosting a **Media Solidarity Festival** this 10 May 2026 (Sunday).

Aside from the launch of CIJ's Media Landscape Report, this **public event** will serve as a call for all stakeholders to band together to support the rights of journalists and push for a free, independent media. This event will also provide a platform for civil society and the media to connect over their work on public interest issues. Other activities include panel sessions featuring the Media Council board and environmental journalists covering issues locally and in Indonesia. Furthermore, the event will host an art exhibition by The Artist Network, featuring community media covering environmental issues. Booths featuring journalists and civil society will also run concurrently throughout the event.

In light of the growing global Despite the many challenges the Malaysian media faces, CIJ remains hopeful for the future of Malaysian media.

3 May 2026

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The Centre for Independent Journalism is a 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.