

## PRESS STATEMENT

30 April 2026

### Malaysia's Decline in 2026 RSF Press Freedom Index Signals Urgent Need for Reform

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The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) Malaysia expresses serious concern over Malaysia's drop from #88 to #95 in the 2026 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index.

Globally we are seeing an unprecedented number of killings of journalists in Gaza, Palestine, Sudan and Philippines and a significant trust deficit in mainstream media. Thus, Malaysia's decline is not just a symbolic decline as it reflects real and worsening conditions for press freedom globally and in the country.

Malaysia's overall score has fallen from 56.09 to 52.73, with notable deterioration across key indicators, particularly in the legal, social, and economic environments for journalism. This is especially disheartening as the entry into force of the Malaysian Media Council Act 2025 should have provided the Madani government the opportunity to demonstrate the commitment to promoting a free and independent media.

Malaysia still maintains an arsenal of draconian legislations that are often weaponised to curb media freedom. The growing pattern of legal crackdowns, intimidation, and harassment of journalists signals a troubling ecosystem.

Recent cases underscore these issues against journalists fostering a culture of fear within the media. *Malaysiakini* journalist B Nantha Kumar faced investigation under Section 203A of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act, followed by a police raid on his home, after reporting on a proposed migrant worker recruitment system, a matter of governance and public interest.

Likewise, former *Free Malaysia Today* journalist Rex Tan was arrested under Section 4(1) of the Sedition Act, Section 505(c) of the Penal Code, and Section 233 of the Communications and Multimedia Act after posing a question at a public lecture, and was subsequently harassed, threatened and doxxed online, jeopardising his personal safety.

These incidents reflect how excessive legal measures, intimidation, and threats beyond formal proceedings can deter journalists from carrying out their work, undermining press freedom and the public's right to information.

The increasing use of laws and regulatory pressure against media outlets and reporters must stop. Journalists should not face intimidation for doing their jobs — especially when reporting on issues of public interest such as corruption, governance failures, and sensitive 3R (race, religion, royalty) matters.

Censoring or penalising the media for scrutinising power undermines transparency, weakens democratic accountability, and erodes public trust.

A government committed to reform must protect and not punish independent journalism.

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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.*