

Independent country, but media remains shackled

Written by straits-mongrel

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Media release by [Centre for Independent Journalism](#) (CIJ) Malaysia

As we celebrate anew the liberation of Malaya from colonialisation, the Centre for Independent Journalism is compelled to remind all that the mass media, a pivotal democratic institution, is still shackled at great cost to the development of the nation as a mature and modern society.

There are many factors impinging on media freedom, but arguably the biggest obstacle is the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984.

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The draconian provisions of the law have been most effective in ensuring that the press bows to the demands of the state until the idea of media freedom has become anathema to some media practitioners themselves.

It is a sad irony that the institution whose function is to give voice to the voiceless is itself rendered voiceless when it comes to the cause that enables this very function.

Rather, some allow and encourage strident voices that seek to further restrict freedom of expression. There is an unabated, dangerous trend of intolerance of opinion that is now leaning to violence as a means to silence others, especially on issues related to ethnicity and religion. This is partly caused by the media's failure to provide a forum for rational and reasoned public debate and discussion, and partly because the media is being used instead to champion narrow, racist agendas.

Hence, the price of a shackled media is not only growing irrelevance as audiences seek alternative sources of information and expression that are unimpeded by ownership and control issues, but worse – social unrest, one of the concerns that the PPPA is supposed to prevent.

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CIJ urges all media outlets to seize the opportunity provided by Malaya's Independence Day to reflect the lack of their own independence and how this has engendered a general lack of respect for the profession. For its own survival, the media must reclaim its freedom.

Earlier this year, The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) called for a review of the PPPA in conjunction World Press Freedom Day. Yet a decade ago, 951 print journalists signed a petition calling for the repeal of the same law.

It's long past due for both media and the people to sound the clarion call for "Media Merdeka!"

After 53 years of independence in the peninsula and 47 in Sabah and Sarawak, isn't it time for the media to be independent, too?

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