

Press Still Shackled Despite PPPA Amendments
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By The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ)

The Centre for Independent Journalism (CIJ) is of the view that the tabled amendments to the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984 (PPPA) do not go far enough in ensuring media freedom in Malaysia.

CIJ cautiously welcomes that the Home Minister will no longer have absolute discretion to approve printing licences and publishing permits, and the reinstatement of judicial oversight over the minister's decisions.

These changes, however, by themselves are far from adequate to ensure that the media is free to report fairly and accurately. No government minister should ever have had absolute discretion to approve publishing permits in the first place. The amendments only abolished some of the heavy-handed provisions that placed too much power in the executive's hands, which should never have been allowed in the first place.

The fact that publishing permits must still be granted and the minister has a right to revoke or suspend these permits means that the government still has effective control over the Malaysian print media.

Newspapers would still be subjected to show-cause letters and be required to answer summonses to the Home Ministry if they published articles that displeased the minister or ministry officials. These show-cause letters may still be used as a political tool by any political party in government should a newspaper run foul of its voter-base. Editors would also still be subject to calls from the ministry dispensing "advice". These aspects are all not consistent with the concept of a free media that is able to serve the public interest by reporting fairly and holding the government and those in power to account.

The proposed amendments also do not address the fact that most major Malaysian newspapers are owned by political parties. The amendments therefore do not address the additional barrier editors and journalists face in trying to report in a fair and balanced manner.

CIJ is of the view that the PPPA in its entirety should be repealed and newspapers should be free to publish without the need for a government permit. There are sufficient laws in place to deal with newspapers that publish false news without the need for ministerial oversight. To ensure true media freedom, the issue of media ownership will also need to be addressed.

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(The views expressed above belongs to the author in its entirety and does not represent the opinion of Malaysian Mirror in any way)