

M'sia up 22 rungs on World Press Freedom Index

PETALING JAYA: Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has congratulated the country for having jumped 22 places in the latest World Press Freedom Index.

The Prime Minister took to Instagram to express his appreciation that the country has seen an improvement in its ranking.

"In conjunction with #WorldPressFreedomDay I take this opportunity to commend the Malaysian media on its improved ranking in the World Press Freedom Index.

"We jumped 22 places to be the top in South-East Asia and 123rd in the world (out of 180 countries).

"Thank you and congratulations," he posted on Instagram yesterday on World Press Freedom Day.

The post was accompanied by several pictures of him being interviewed and photographed by Malaysian media personnel.

The World Press Freedom Index showed that Malaysia tops rankings among South-East Asian countries, with Indonesia (124th), Philippines (134th), Thailand (136th), Myanmar (138th), Cambodia (143rd), Singapore (151st), Brunei (152nd), Laos (171st) and Vietnam (176th).

The latest index, released on April 18, is compiled by the Paris-based organisation Reporters without Borders (RSF) and ranks countries according to the level of freedom available to journalists.

RSF had said that press freedom

received a breath of fresh air in Malaysia after Barisan Nasional lost the general election last May.

They said journalists and media outlets that were previously black-listed, such as cartoonist Zunar and the Sarawak Report news portal, were able to resume working without fear of harassment.

RSF, however, said there were still draconian laws that could be used to suppress media freedom that the government has yet to repeal.

These laws include the Sedition Act 1948, the Official Secrets Act 1972 and the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.

While the National Union of Journalists Malaysia (NUJ) noted the

improved Index ranking as "encouraging", it urged the government to repeal laws that jeopardise press freedom.

The union specifically named the Printing, Presses and Publishing Act 1984 as being one law that infringes upon press freedom.

NUJ general secretary Chin Sung Chew said after the 14th General Election, journalists continued to advocate impartial coverage for both sides of the political divide to uphold the people's right to information.

"We hope the new government will seriously look at the draconian laws that constrict press freedom and threaten journalists, and make the desired changes," he said.