



SUPPORTING  
AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT  
FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

# Enabling Environment Snapshot

Malaysia

2026

## Context

**Period covered by the report:** June 2025-April 2026.

Malaysia's stewardship of ASEAN in 2025 entailed commendable efforts in advancing inclusivity, sustainability, and deeper inter-regional cooperation. The country led the adoption of the [ASEAN Community Vision 2045](#), a people-centred roadmap for the next two decades. Putrajaya's diplomatic agility was most evident in its [mediation](#) of the Thailand-Cambodia border conflict, which culminated in the [Kuala Lumpur Peace Accord](#) in October 2025, successfully de-escalating years of intermittent tensions. The 47th ASEAN Summit further solidified this legacy through the historic [adoption](#) of two landmark instruments: the [ASEAN Declaration on the Right to a Safe, Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment](#) and the [Declaration on Promoting the Right to Development and the Right to Peace Towards Realising Inclusive and Sustainable Development](#). These commitments reflect a major shift toward addressing regional challenges—from climate change to inequalities in development—through a rights-based lens. Other notable [milestones](#) include formalising Timor-Leste's accession as the 11th member state and facilitating a review of the Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar, which maintained a steady, dialogue-based approach to the regional crisis.

While these regional milestones bolstered Malaysia's international standing, they stood in stark contrast to the domestic reality. The period between 2025 and March 2026 was marked by a profound disconnect between the government's reformist rhetoric and an entrenched state apparatus that continues to prioritise securitised control and institutional preservation over constitutional safeguards and accountability.

The judiciary emerged as a key battleground for upholding constitutional safeguards and justice against state-perpetrated violations. Progressive landmark rulings were met with persistent state pushback, as evident in the government's successful [appeal](#) against the Heidi Quah ruling—which had [invalidated](#) "offensive" and "annoy" under Section 233 of the CMA—and the Attorney General's Chambers' (AGC) successful application to [stay](#) the [RM37](#) and [RM3](#) million compensation awarded for the enforced disappearances of Pastor Raymond Koh and Amri Che Mat respectively. This environment where the state actively seeks to overturn rights-affirming precedents, amidst punitive enforcement against the exercise of freedom of expression and assembly, justifies the CIVICUS Monitor's [maintenance](#) of Malaysia's rating as 'Obstructed' in 2025, which also cites the systemic harassment of human rights defenders and journalists.

Implementation of reforms related to institutional oversight, governance and civil and political rights has been uneven. [Amendments](#) to the Whistleblower Protection Act and the [reintroduction](#) of the [Parliamentary Services Act](#) signal responsiveness to long-standing demands, yet they sit alongside a [procurement law](#) that centralises wide discretionary powers in the Finance Minister. The government's commitment to an indiscriminate anti-corruption agenda was further called into question following Bloomberg's investigative reporting in early 2026, which alleged Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's Chief Commissioner Azam Baki's conflict of interest regarding [shareholdings](#) and alleged abetment in a [corporate mafia scheme](#). On another note, the tabling of high-stakes reforms in Parliament—namely the [Ombudsman Bill](#), the [Freedom of Information \(FOI\) Bill](#), and constitutional [amendments](#) to separate the Attorney General (AG) and Public Prosecutor (PP) roles—were deferred until

2026. Only the Bill on AG-PP saw progress, being scheduled to be [retabled](#) in the second Parliamentary sitting of 2026 after [referral](#) to a Parliamentary Special Select Committee for review. Critical reviews of the [Peaceful Assembly Act](#) (PAA) and the [Security Offences \(Special Measures\) Act \(SOSMA\)](#) remain protracted in progress. SOSMA, in particular, is emblematic of reform stagnation, in light of prior amendment pledges made in [2023](#).

Policing of marginalised groups [intensified](#), as religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, and citizenship status remained key terrains of control. State Islamic institutions deepen efforts to expand Syariah-based authority, increasingly targeting alternative spiritual and wellness practices while rebranding theological non-conformity as a matter of national security surveillance. LGBTQI+ persons faced a surge in arrests, censorship, and coordinated misinformation. This securitised approach extended to migrant and refugee populations. In 2025, a 10-year high of 92,360 undocumented migrants were arrested. Enforcement became significantly more intrusive via the integration of advanced thermal drone technology into immigration raids, marking a shift toward aerial surveillance that bypasses traditional residential privacy and further traumatises communities already living in precarious legality.

## 1. Respect and protection of fundamental freedoms

Malaysia's fundamental freedoms environment shows a deteriorating trend, characterised by intensified policing, pre-emptive arrests, and selective prosecutions despite reformist rhetoric. Executive commitments to reform the [Peaceful Assembly Act](#) (PAA)—including [deletion](#) of Section 11 and [review](#) of Section 9(5)—were eclipsed by punitive policing practices. Dissent—especially political, [student-led](#), and media-driven—faces escalating intimidation. Key events observed during the monitoring period include:

- 2025 – SUARAM [recorded](#) a five-year high in assembly-related arrests, including the first formal charges of six organisers under the current administration. Policing of symbolic expression in assemblies intensified in 2025, characterised by arrests of individuals for [burning posters](#) or [whipping effigies](#) of Anwar, and [investigations](#) against organisers for using Israeli flags during a Gaza solidarity reenactment.
- Sedition Act (SA)-related arrests also [surged](#) by 81.25%. Despite state [justifications](#) of escalated use of the SA as "swift action" necessitated by 3R sensitivities, the consistently low rate of formal charges—only three in 2025—suggests the SA functions primarily as a tool for pre-emptive intimidation and the short-term neutralisation of dissent. Meanwhile, the government [maintains](#) that any changes to the [Sedition Act](#) (SA) require "thorough and careful consideration" to balance free speech against the "need to preserve harmony."
- June 2025 – The Federal Court [ruled](#) that the 2014 [fatwa](#) branding Sisters in Islam (SIS) as "deviant" was invalid when applied to a corporate entity, but its continued applicability to individual Muslims leaves SIS staff exposed to the risk of reprisals under Syariah law. Despite the ruling, SIS was compelled to [drop](#) "Islam" from its name following [pressure](#) from the Selangor Sultan.
- July 2025 – The Federal Court [struck down](#) Section 9(5) of the PAA as unconstitutional, yet police pivoted to [Penal Code](#) provisions (notably Section 186 was used in 65.2% of cases recorded by SUARAM in 2025) to criminalise protests.
- Malaysia rose to 88th in the 2025 RSF [World Press Freedom Index](#), but remains rated "Problematic", as [modest reforms](#) like the Malaysian Media Council are outweighed by punitive

regulatory and criminal actions against media outlets—including use of the [Printing Presses and Publications Act, Section 233](#) of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) over minor or corrected editorial errors, [inaccurate headlines](#) or [incomplete depictions](#) of the national flag.

- November 2025–February 2026 – [Abuse of police powers](#) against six Sabah student activists, who were subjected to ambush arrests, denial of legal counsel, and [coercive Special Branch tactics](#) despite voluntary cooperation, with the SA and Penal Code provisions used to criminalise peaceful, assembly-related expression by the back door. This undermines due process, chills constitutional rights, and contradicts the spirit of reform enshrined in the Federal Court’s Section 9(5) [ruling](#) and the government’s commitment to amending the PAA .
- November 2025 – Muslim-Friendly Watch [dissolved](#) under regulatory and public [scrutiny](#) of its Muslim Choice label—illustrating persistent vulnerability of faith-linked civil society groups.
- January 2026 – the Home Ministry’s study on riot-related laws—exploring pre-emptive arrests, new preventive mechanisms, and the notion of “online riots”—has been [criticised](#) for its likely conflation of peaceful protest with criminal disorder, enabling security-based policing of assemblies and justifying intrusive surveillance and censorship that erode both offline and digital freedoms.
- January 2026 – The Attorney General’s Chambers sought a [review](#) of the Section 9(5) [ruling under Rule 137](#), [withdrawing](#) only after public backlash and [condemnation](#) from civil society.
- February 2026 - There was political pressure on international media including police [investigation](#) of Bloomberg under Section 500 of the Penal Code and Section 233 of the CMA over [reporting](#) on MACC Chief Commissioner Azam Baki’s alleged conflicts of interest, while Azam [filed a RM100 million defamation suit](#), reinforcing concerns that criminal probes and civil litigation are being used to intimidate investigative journalism and prioritise institutional reputation over public transparency.
- Authorities increasingly used non-speech offences to obstruct investigative journalism, [charging](#) Nantha Kumar in March 2025 for alleged bribery shortly after exposing migrant smuggling at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) (and [re-investigating him](#) in March 2026), and [arresting](#) Kalidas Subramaniom in March 2026 for criminal trespass while reporting on allegations involving 300 undocumented migrants, signalling a pattern of punitive law enforcement against investigative inquiry.
- April 2026 – TikTok user *Jorjet Myla* was [arrested](#) and [remanded](#) for three days under the Sedition Act after criticising the Prime Minister; police only confirmed the arrest following family disclosure. Three more activists were [arrested](#) and [remanded for three days](#) in April 2026 after a peaceful protest against Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Chief Commissioner Azam Baki during a public forum, investigated for insulting behaviour, criminal trespass, and obstruction of a public servant, while the X account of youth-led group MANDIRI was [suspended](#) shortly after the incident.
- Criminalisation of communal discourse (early 2026) was observed when Journalist Rex Tan was [detained](#) under the Sedition Act, Penal Code, and Section 233 CMA for posing a question at a public conference, then [subjected to doxxing](#) and threats without protection, highlighting the state’s continued reliance on punitive investigation over media self-regulation through the Malaysian Media Council.

The evidence points to an [obstructed civic space](#) where vague legislation and punitive enforcement replace clear safeguards. Activists face heightened arrest risks, while judicial victories offer limited protection on the ground. The chilling effect discourages mobilisation, critical speech, and sustained advocacy, especially among youth and students.

## 2. Supportive legal framework for the work of civil society actors

Malaysia's legal framework for civil society remains structurally restrictive, granting the executive wide discretion while enabling indirect repression through administrative control and lawfare. CSOs are regulated under multiple laws, among them the [Societies Act 1966](#), [Companies Act 2016](#), [Trade Unions Act 1959](#), [Trustees \(Incorporation\) Act 1952](#), and the [Universities and University Colleges Act 1971](#) (UUCA). The Societies Act 1966 remains among the most consequential, granting the Home Minister powers to declare societies unlawful on vague grounds such as 'morality' or 'public order,' and allowing the Registrar of Societies (RoS) broad discretion to refuse or cancel registrations without sufficient procedural safeguards.

- June 2025 – Universiti Malaya [policy](#) required all student groups to appoint university-approved advisers and centralised venue approvals, curbing student autonomy—a process previously managed independently by the Universiti Malaya Student Union (UMSU). This has triggered significant operational delays and facilitated arbitrary cancellations of events without a formal appeals mechanism.
- March 2026 – Universiti Malaya issued a [cease-and-desist letter](#) against Liga Mahasiswa Universiti Malaya (LMUM). Using trademark law, the university demanded that LMUM—not formally registered as an official society under the university—immediately stop using the "Universiti Malaya" name and logo within seven days or face a civil suit—an escalation in reprisals beyond traditional disciplinary measures under the UUCA, signalling a shift toward lawfare to delegitimise informal, unregistered associations.
- April 2026 – No updates on proposed 2024 amendments to the Societies Act, which reportedly included provisions requiring RoS approval for all fundraising, renewal of registration every three years, capping salary expenditure at 25% of revenue, and mandatory disciplinary boards.

The operating environment for associations—especially informal or student-led groups—is narrowing through administrative coercion rather than overt bans. These practices raise compliance costs, undermine autonomy, and signal that unregistered or critical student organising will be legally subordinated.

## 3. Accessible and sustainable resources

Civil society funding in Malaysia is increasingly precarious, marked by donor conditionality, short-term project support, and a sharp contraction in international aid that disproportionately affects rights-based and community-based organisations.

- January 2025 – The U.S. administration imposed a [90-day foreign aid freeze](#), followed by [cancellation](#) of 83% of USAID programmes and structural downsizing continuing into 2026. This forced a wide spectrum of Malaysian CSOs—particularly those focused on civil and political rights, institutional reform, migrant and refugee rights, and diversity and inclusion—to navigate a new normal of systemic scarcity. Many CSOs have been compelled to scale back operations permanently or shutter specialised programmes, intensifying competition between larger organisations and smaller grassroots groups. This heightened rivalry for increasingly limited grants in turn placed a significant strain on the ecosystem, potentially eroding the specialised capacities and diversity of the sector.

- 2025–2026 – Refugee-focused CSOs [reported](#) major programme closures following the termination of U.S. refugee resettlement pathways.
- April 2026: There is constrained and uneven access to funding as Malaysian CSOs draw on mixed domestic and international sources, but local funding is largely confined to non-contentious development work and often restricts engagement on “sensitive” issues—excluding rights-based and LGBTQI+ organisations, which remain heavily reliant on foreign donors.
- Structural barriers for smaller groups persist as of April 2026 with smaller or unregistered CSOs, particularly those led by socio-economically marginalised communities, facing language and grant-writing constraints that limit direct access to funding and pushing them to depend on larger intermediary organisations.
- Rigid, project-based funding undermines CSO sustainability. Short-term, activity-specific grants with limited flexibility for core costs force many CSOs to struggle with staff retention and continuity, while donor-driven priorities incentivise mission drift toward fundable themes—weakening long-term strategy, institutional resilience, and sustained impact.

The funding squeeze has reduced organisational resilience, forcing CSOs to downsize, merge, or abandon specialised advocacy. Smaller grassroots groups face exclusion, while competition over limited grants risks hollowing out sector diversity and long-term reform capacity.

## 4. State openness and responsiveness

State openness in Malaysia remains uneven and reactive, with selective consultation and delayed transparency reforms reinforcing unilateral decision-making that bypasses meaningful CSO inclusion in the policymaking process. Freedom of Information (FOI) laws in Malaysia are only implemented at the state level in [Selangor](#) and [Penang](#). However, their efficacy is undermined by structural and implementation gaps. Overbroad exemptions that are subordinate to the [Official Secrets Act 1972](#) (OSA) and the absence of a proactive disclosure mandate have entrenched a culture of secrecy. Limited institutional readiness persists; frontline officers frequently lack awareness of FOI procedures, leading to systemic delays or arbitrary rejections. These incidents, compounded by requirements for applicants to justify their requests and pay fees, demonstrate a persistent culture of secrecy that discourages the exercise of right to information for public accountability. Key events during the monitoring period include:

- 2025–early 2026 – Tabling of the federal [FOI Bill](#) was repeatedly postponed, with the [target date pushed to early 2026](#), while the government continued to signal its [intention](#) to retain the OSA (albeit amending it).
- While the government has shown capacity for inclusive policymaking—most notably through [the pro-tem FOI Bill committee](#) that incorporated CSOs, academia, and legal experts—broader stakeholder engagement remains inconsistent and is often limited to “briefing-style” consultations that lack genuine dialogue or transparency on how inputs are used.
- The routine classification of draft legislation under the OSA severely restricts external scrutiny, with CSOs typically gaining access only after a Bill’s first parliamentary reading. This deficit in meaningful inclusion was evident in the passage of the [Government Procurement Act 2025](#) despite civil society’s [calls to delay](#) tabling for comprehensive review.

- February 2025 – The Penang FOI Appeals Board [strongly criticised](#) the city council for failing to respond to an access to information request within the statutory timeframe.
- October 2025 – The Selangor state government [rejected](#) an access to information request regarding the Selangor Intelligent Parking System despite a lack of reasonable justification for non-disclosure.
- January 2026 – Fifteen Orang Asli organisations [rejected](#) amendments to the [Aboriginal Peoples Act 1954](#), citing violations of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (<https://pacamalaysia.org>).
- March 2026 – [The Constitution \(Amendment\) \(No. 2\) Bill 2026](#) on separating the Attorney General and Public Prosecutor roles prompted a more responsive approach, with the government [referring](#) the Bill to a Parliamentary Special Select Committee. Nevertheless, this was the result of sustained CSO advocacy and cross-partisan [pressure](#).

Consultation is treated as exceptional rather than being embedded as a foundational step in the legislative process, often occurring only after political pressure. This limits CSOs' influence over lawmaking and entrenches a governance culture where participation is symbolic, not deliberative.

## 5. Political Culture and Public Discourses on Civil Society

Public discourse frames civil society legitimacy as conditional and securitised, with critical advocacy increasingly portrayed as subversive or externally driven. Although the role of CSOs in nation-building is generally recognised, it can be easily superseded by a security-first narrative that rebrands accountability as an act of subversion. Key evidence from the monitoring period includes:

- April and August 2025 — Malaysian authorities treated civic participation by Falun Gong practitioners as a state-managed privilege rather than an inherent right, exemplified by the April 2025 [arrest and remand](#) of over 70 followers (including elderly individuals and children) under the Societies Act just before a Chinese state visit—followed by their release after the visit—and echoed in August 2025 at Tugu Negara, where practitioners [reported](#) that individuals claiming to be “China police” confiscated their materials, indicating a pattern of pre-emptive, politically motivated policing affecting minority groups' civic freedoms.
- November 2025 — During a raid in Chow Kit targeting LGBTQI+ individuals, Malaysian media amplified state-sponsored stigmatisation by [filming and photographing](#) detainees, prioritising sensationalist morality narratives while excluding civil society and legal perspectives; this coverage obscured [alleged police misconduct](#) (including ill-treatment, sexual harassment, and due-process violations) and legitimised discriminatory state action by framing fundamental rights as conditional on perceived morality.
- December 2025 – LGBTQI+-related NGOs such as Justice for Sisters (JFS) faced police probes, state-aligned harassment, criminalisation and vilification following health-oriented programmes, exemplified by PAS [Youth's police report](#) seeking to outlaw the NGO for providing legal and psychosocial support to over 200 men detained during a Chow Kit health club raid, denouncing its human rights work as “disgusting acts”—reflecting [a troubling trend](#) of reframing legitimate support services as criminal subversion.

- January 2026 – The [MACC launched investigations](#) into three NGOs over alleged large scale misappropriation of public donations. This raises civic space concerns that specific cases of misconduct could be instrumentalised to justify sweeping regulatory controls, a trajectory signalled by the MACC Chief Commissioner Azam Baki’s [proposals](#) for new laws such as the Welfare Act. While aimed at preventing fraud, these blanket measures risk imposing disproportionate bureaucratic burdens on smaller, rights-based CSOs, and further constraining the independence of the third sector.
- March 2026 – Police invoked Section 124B of the [Penal Code](#) (activities detrimental to parliamentary democracy) to [investigate](#) the anti-corruption non-profit C4 Center CEO Pushpan Murugiah, alongside a former BERSIH representative, academics, and commentators, over an [unsubstantiated alleged “plot”](#). Pushpan was subjected to an [intrusive 1.5-hour interrogation](#), involving 81 questions that probed into C4 Center’s funding sources, internal protocols, and organisational legitimacy—signalling a state-led effort to delegitimise anti-corruption advocacy as a threat instead of democracy oversight.
- January 2026 – Authorities [investigated](#) nine Jejaka executive members under the Penal Code and the Communications and Multimedia Act following the promotion of “Glamping with Pride,” a health-literacy retreat addressing HIV stigma. This followed [coordinated fear-mongering](#) by federal, state, and religious actors, who framed the initiative as a threat to national security and public morality. The resulting climate of physical surveillance and online death threats ultimately forced the event’s [cancellation](#).
- February 2026 — Malaysia Corruption Watch (MCW) [publicly framed](#) the MACC Chief Commissioner Azam Baki’s [RM100 million defamation suit](#) against Bloomberg as a “civilised” exercise of legal rights rather than intimidation of the media, aligning with state rhetoric that international media must avoid being “used by interested parties” to shape “unproven narratives”. This position is fundamentally at odds with the values of a watchdog organisation, as it prioritises the protection of institutional reputation over transparency and media freedom essential to uncovering corruption.
- Although [civic education](#) exists in public schools, it is routinely deprioritised in an exam-oriented system. SUHAKAM’s [ATHAM](#) human rights programme, implemented in 468 schools, remains [non-mandatory](#), depends on individual teacher initiative, and lacks systematic Ministry of Education monitoring or evaluation of implementation and impact.

This climate accelerates delegitimation of CSOs, where routine advocacy work attracts state scrutiny. Marginalised groups bear heightened exposure to surveillance, threats, and violence, weakening pluralism and public solidarity.

## 6. Access to a secure digital environment

Malaysia’s digital space is rapidly contracting, as regulatory expansion, platform liability, and moral governance override rights-based protections for online expression and participation. SUARAM [noted](#) an all-time high in the number of media-reported investigations involving [Section 233](#) of the Communications and Multimedia Act (CMA) in 2025 within the five-year period. Constructive policy criticisms, satire against political leaders, health outreach with the LGBTQI+ community and political education were criminalised under the provision that was amended in December 2024, narrowing the digital space for legitimate public interest discourse, dissent, and minority advocacy.

- May–November 2025 — The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) [filed a civil suit](#) in May 2025 against Telegram Messenger Inc. and anonymous administrators of the “Edisi Siasat” and “Edisi Khas” channels, securing successive injunctions

including [an Erinford injunction](#) (October 2025) and a [Judgment in Default](#) (November 2025); the first Malaysian case targeting a platform for non-compliance with CMA takedown orders, it framed “harm” primarily around institutional reputation, national security, and public order while disregarding the public interest in whistleblower-style information, signalling an emerging model of compelled intermediary policing of anonymous investigative speech absent robust due-process safeguards.

- August 2025–February 2026 — The Malaysian Court of Appeal briefly [struck down](#) vague terms (“offensive,” “annoy”) in Section 233 of the CMA as unconstitutional in August 2025. But the February 2026 [Federal Court ruling](#) reinstated these terms, indicating a significant setback in freedom of expression. In its judgement, the Federal Court excluded certain speech (e.g. criticism of the monarchy or religious sensitivities) from protection at the outset, conflated hate speech with protected but offensive expression, legitimised the inadequate “intent to annoy” threshold as a failed remedy for unwarranted prosecutions, and [incorrectly suggested](#) that online speech warrants broader restrictions than offline speech.
- September 2025–February 2026 —The MCMC acted as an active plaintiff in cross-border litigation by filing reports in Malaysia and Thailand that led to the September 2025 [arrest of journalist](#) Murray Hunter in Bangkok and his November 2025 criminal [defamation indictment](#) over online articles critical of the regulator. Although resolved in early 2026 via a [Consent Order](#) and [full retraction](#), this case set a troubling precedent for transnational SLAPP-style actions by MCMC, blurring the line between content regulation and the use of criminal processes to deter institutional scrutiny.
- November 2025— The government [has signalled](#) since November 2025 its intention to impose [a blanket ban](#) on social media for children under 16 by June 2026, to be implemented via the Child Protection Code under the Online Safety Act (ONSA). Civil society [groups warn](#) that the measure is disproportionate, as it fails to address structural causes of online harm; undermines children’s rights to expression, information, and participation; risks normalising intrusive electronic Know Your Customer (e-KYC) verification that could exacerbate privacy violations and discrimination; and [raises concerns](#) of executive overreach by bypassing full parliamentary scrutiny through subsidiary legislation.
- By late 2025, [DataReportal indicates](#) that Malaysia recorded 44.0 million mobile connections (122% of the population), 35.4 million internet users (98% penetration), and 30.7 million social media user identities (85% of the population), reflecting near-universal digital connectivity. While this scale of access significantly expands potential reach, mobilisation, and participation for civil society, it also intensifies exposure to platform governance, surveillance, and regulatory intervention, making digital space a highly consequential—yet increasingly contested—enabling environment for civic action and human rights advocacy.
- Effective 1 January 2026 —Major messaging and social media platforms with eight million or more users in Malaysia—including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, and TikTok—became [automatically licensed](#) under a “deeming provision” in Section 46A of the CMA, a move promoted by the government as enhancing platform accountability but signalling increased consolidation of regulatory authority over global digital intermediaries through MCMC oversight.
- January–February 2026 — The MCMC conditioned platform access on compliance with state-defined morality by [temporarily blocking](#) AI chatbot Grok on X in January 2026 over non-consensual sexual content [until additional safeguards](#) were implemented, while simultaneously [blocking](#) LGBTQI+ dating apps Grindr and Blued. By February 2026, the Communications Ministry signalled further legal action against LGBTQI+ dating apps on app stores, framing them as threats to public morality—disproportionately restricting LGBTQI+ communities’ access to vital spaces for support, health information, and community-building.

- March 2026 — The government [confirmed](#) it would pursue no further amendments to Section 233 of the CMA, asserting that the February 2026 Federal Court ruling sufficiently strengthens the legal basis for policy implementation and enforcement to promote a purportedly “safe” and “responsible” digital ecosystem.
- Ongoing — Algorithm-driven platforms and short-form content continue to marginalise nuanced human-rights narratives in favour of sensationalism, while heightened state scrutiny—through informal intimidation, platform takedown requests, account restrictions, and police investigations—constrains online rights-based advocacy. This is illustrated by Fahmi Reza’s [investigation](#) under the Sedition Act, Section 233 of the CMA, and Section 504 of the Penal Code following a TikTok livestream on the Sabah state elections. The said livestream was also [flagged](#) for “hate speech.”

Expanded digital controls enable surveillance, content suppression, and cross-border intimidation, disproportionately affecting journalists, activists, and minority communities. The result is heightened self-censorship and reduced access to digital spaces essential for organising and support.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Over the next six months, enforcement trends related to the Sedition Act, Section 233 of the CMA and the Penal Code against the exercise of freedom of expression and/or assembly are expected to remain volatile, as public scrutiny intensifies over high-profile corruption [allegations](#) involving the MACC Chief Commissioner and resulting criticisms of political leaders over the systemic lack of transparency and accountability in addressing corruption. This is already manifesting in the investigation into MUDA member Luqman Long, who was [summoned](#) to MCMC for questioning on 20 April 2026 under Section 233 of the CMA and Section 504 of the Penal Code regarding content related to the Azam Baki controversy.

Censorship of materials on the basis of jeopardy to public morality, national security and/or public order is likely to remain intense, already seen in the Home Ministry’s [ban](#) on two memoirs published by Gerakbudaya recounting the Malayan Communist Party’s anti-colonial struggle. Similarly, the scrutiny of freedom of assembly and association of public university students on campus is likely to be subjected to a climate of heightened surveillance and moral policing. This was exemplified by the reaction of Universiti Malaya (UM) and the Ministry of Higher Education to a “steamy” theatrical scene that went viral in April 2026. Rather than defending artistic freedom, the university issued a formal [apology](#) and disqualified the performance, while the Ministry [sought](#) a comprehensive report, effectively sanctioning a more intrusive vetting process that further erodes student autonomy and creative expression.

The upcoming June/July parliamentary sitting presents a critical opportunity for institutional reform and the advancement of civil and political rights. Civil society must prioritise coordinated advocacy efforts to influence the outcome of the AG-PP separation amendments, as the PSSC is expected to [complete](#) its review by May 2026. This window is equally vital for the anticipated tabling of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill and potential amendments to the [Security Offences \(Special Measures\) Act 2012](#) (SOSMA). To achieve genuine transparency, the FOI Bill must provide for the establishment of an Independent Information Commission and necessitate the repeal of the Official Secrets Act (OSA) and Section 203A of the Penal Code. The SOSMA amendments must address, at the minimum, the systemic denial

of bail, the 28-day detention period without judicial oversight, and the problematic Section 30, which allows for the continued detention of acquitted individuals pending appeal.

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