



## INTERVIEW WITH DIN MERICAN, PROMINENT BLOGGER

1 July 2009, PKR Offices, Petaling Jaya

*Interview conducted by panel members Shona Leppanen-Gibson (SLG), Vicknaraj Thanarajah (VT), and Wai Kiong Chan (WKC)*

*(Due to equipment malfunction, the sound quality of this interview was affected adversely, and therefore, the full transcript is not available at this time.)*

*VT: When and why did you start blogging and what has been the reception?*

DM: Well you know, I used to be a visitor to a lot of blogs and I used to pass my comments. One day when I joined Keadilan in September 2007, on an almost full time basis, I was persuaded by a young friend who said, 'Instead of you commenting on other people's blogs, why don't you put your views on your own blog?' And I said, 'Hell, I don't know how to blog.' So he started me off, he set up the blog, taught me, taught me for a week! And I keep bugging him all the time, but they are so busy,



you know. So I decided I should learn how to do the whole site myself. That was my start and now, it is quite popular, close to 2 million hits – it's 1.9 something now. So by the end of this month, I think I will hit 2 million. So it has been quite useful. As useful as a way of sharing some of my experiences with the younger generation. I also use the blog to explain to people about

the party, what they are trying to do, and of course to criticise the other side. That's blogging.

*SLG: Given your reputation of taking a keen interest in principles that embrace ethics, integrity and transparency, do you see new media as having had a significant impact on Malaysian society?*

DM: Let me put this as a background. I was a central banker and I would work to set the banks up, and I would be the governor. So this idea of ethics in inculcated in me. The same in fact with my friend, Tunku Aziz, all from my generation, the saying "service before self". So that's where this

comes from. So this new media is a very useful tool, due to the fact that the media here – what we call the mainstream media here – is controlled by the Government. So it's the voice of the Government. So the Internet – now, today – has become the voice of the people. And part of the problem today with the present Government is that many people ...and they got heavily beaten in March 2008, so it is a very useful tool.

*WKC: What is your perspective on new media freedom and censorship?*

DM: I think that you can talk about the Bill of Guarantees but the Government is always trying to find ways to control it. Sometimes they do block it but not in a direct way. They call the host, provider or the person who has access to it. There are a number of things you can do, have it hosted elsewhere – and I think Raja Petra did the same thing. They arranged for him to have an alternative host. Like in Singapore, or the United States and there is nothing they can do. And I think a lot of people are being hosted abroad. And because they are being hosted abroad, they can say a lot more nasty things. I think the key problem is very simple. If this Government is very transparent, very open, willing to accept criticism, I think we don't have people criticizing them. I think the key thing is to engage people, not to disengage them or cut them off. So I think this is a message that the present Government, after fifty over years in government, running this country, is unable to appreciate. You've got to deal with a different generation that's more educated, that's more exposed, that's more gutsy, you know. My generation was really, you know, we respect our parents a lot, our teachers a lot. Nowadays kids, especially some kids in the primary schools and all that. It was typical – if you don't know how to deal with them, understand their paradigm, then you're in very deep trouble.

*VT: In your view is the influence of new media on the political system significant? Has it altered the dynamics of the relationship between politicians and citizens?*

DM: It applied in certain groups of politicians. But it doesn't apply in the case of the present Government. It's so, so sure of itself, that even the March 8<sup>th</sup> shockwave, did not change their demeanour. In fact they became more guarded, in fear that they are under siege. But the key thing is, sometimes people are frustrated,

So I think that the new media is really changing the politics in this country. But it is doing is... You will see it come the next election. Because if they continue as they are, let me assure you, if I am still around, there will surely be a big change in this country. People are just fed up. They saw all these fine great things, they want to open this country for investment, they have just now , but they don't even do basic things that will attract investment. One – you have to fight corruption, before anyone

else will want to do business. The other one is respect the rule of law. We must ensure the judiciary is . Dead people have voted, right now, ... You know where they went for arbitration? Singapore! Why must they do that? They can't do it here, because they know they can't get justice. So for the time being, until they fix the corruption issue, became more transparent and accountable. I think the sooner they appreciate that, the better it is for them. Their chances of winning the next election, you know.

*SLG: You spoke about the Bill of Guarantees a little earlier, so just picking up on that – the Bill of Guarantees under the Communication and Multimedia Act. What is your perspective on that Bill?*

DM: I think that Bill is a commitment to the international community. But for us locals, they can roughshod us. But the fact that this is an international guarantee, they have a problem trying to introduce censorship, and that is why they haven't found a way out of it. If there is a way out, you know, these guys will find it. But they don't make it easy.

*WKC: Have you utilised new media to organise any activities or lobby for a certain cause?*

DM: We are always using it! We are working with a group calling itself... with bloggers, they are quite good. They deal with a lot of issues. Human rights, gender stuff. So the new media is being used. And let me say, for the record, we are no more media savvy than the present Government. Thank God for it, you know. For all his faults, Mahathir did something good. Now he himself is a blogger.

*VT: what are your perspectives on social networking applications and sites from a socio-cultural and political standpoint – social applications like Facebook, Twitter, blogging?*

DM: I'm a member of Facebook, my wife is too. I think it's useful for communicating. But what worries me is that there are too many short forms and short versions – people don't communicate in good language anymore. So that is a problem. Social networking should encourage people to engage in proper language, proper English. 'Thank you' becomes 'THX'. That's a bad thing. But otherwise... it's fun, there's lots of games you can play. And in fact, I don't use the Facebook as effectively as say my wife. She uses various angles and things – I just use it as an extension of the email. Apparently this Twitter now – I don't know what it is – I don't know if I should have too many of this stuff, I blog, maybe I'll stick with Facebook for a while. I think this Internet revolution is really transforming the politics, the social networking, business. It's the greatest invention of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

*SLG: In terms of the democratic process, how has new media shaped the manner in which politicians communicate and the environment in which they operate?*

DM: Well, some of the politicians you talk to and many others have begun to realise the power of doing blogs of their own. Lim Kit Siang has, in terms of my generation. Anwar has. Khairy has. Jeff Ooi has. So I think it is increasingly used as a means to communicate. Because you can do it online.



The NMIC Project Team with Din Merican in his offices at PKR Headquarters.

And I hope it puts the mainstream media out of business, you know. Because they have to be set up properly you know. Whereas we just go direct, say what we want in the shortest possible way we can. So I think the new politicians realise the power. The Government has websites, websites of their own. The problem is they don't know how to get enough out of it, they don't know how to update it,

sometimes they're totally inaccurate. In Malaysia we are very good at starting everything first, but everything degenerates, after 18 months – the same thing with all these websites. They are good for show. Today we talk about 1Malaysia, when UMNO itself is a racist party. You talk about old and new economic models, operating in your own paradigm.