



## INTERVIEW WITH YB KHAIRY JAMALUDDIN, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR REMBAU AND UMNO YOUTH PRESIDENT

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

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

KJ: I started blogging actively after the last general elections – March 2008. I think we realised then that the new media had a significant impact on politics. At first we didn't think that it would have the tremendous impact it did but I think it did especially the urban areas a lot of perceptions were



Yang Berhormat Khairy Jamaluddin

altered by what was online. So I started my blog.

I have found that a blog per se – because it is a blog by a government politician – didn't engender or didn't generate as much activity or publicity as I thought it would have, but when I started exploring different platforms, different media which I am sure you are familiar with these

applications, I saw a pickup in activity. So

ultimately when you come from an establishment background, you set up a blog or previously set up a website, there is a prejudice against that site, so you have to find other ways where you are not regarded as an establishment figure, but rather just as another person on the Internet.

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

KJ: Yes of course because first of all you get news output in real time and secondly comments and commentaries are unadulterated, they are uncensored. And the onus of course is on readers to decide whether or not the information they get is accurate or not. But because it is able to send out all this information quickly and without any restrictions it's good in terms of good governance because we can get more information out and I think that is a cornerstone for democracy. You can get more information out quicker and people are able to decide for themselves. Now the only set back to that, or flip-side is that you also get a lot of things that are junk and things that are not true.

So it sharpens politicians and the government to respond quicker as well to things we put out. So we have to migrate from a mindset of control to one of engagement. Control because previously many developing countries found it easier to control the media because they could control the mainstream news. But now they have new media in some countries such as Malaysia.

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

KJ: Well it has made censorship almost redundant because as I said before you can't censor the new media, you can't control it, you can't even really guide it. So you must get your ideas out there. But now people have become more discerning. Most people still get their news from the mainstream media. But the level of acceptance and credibility of the mainstream media and the new media is not far apart.

I think that the scepticism that comes out of the new media is also growing because some if it is very sensational.

*WKC: In your view is the influence of New media on the political system significant and has it altered the dynamics of the relationship between politicians and citizens?*

KJ: Yes I think so, I think it's very significant. Maybe not in some areas where internet penetration isn't pronounced but in urban areas especially among young people I think it has created a sea change in terms of politics. I think politicians must not just appear to be, but actually be accessible on the new media. Appearing to be accessible means that you have a facade on the internet, or website or blog but people are not stupid – young people are not stupid. They know if you are updating it regularly, they know if you are writing it yourself, they know if you are being assisted to write your tweets out, they know this. So people will always value it based on your commitment to new media. We can't just assume that this new media is just something we must have or something on the side – “do I have a website or not?” It's a new constituency. A lot of people spend time in front of the computer so don't think that not spending time in front of the computer yourself, engaging yourself is acceptable anymore because just as much as you go out there- face to face meetings with people, shaking hands, canvassing people in person, there is also important, because you must set time so a politicians diary must change. Previously all this internet stuff was probably outsourced to some guy



**YB Khairy Jamaluddin being interviewed by the New Media and the Informed Citizen Project Team in the halls of the Malaysian Parliament.**

in the office but he himself must sit himself in front of the computer at least for some hours in the day coming up with things himself, reaching out through social networking, reaching out to your constituency on the Internet.

*VT: Khairy, what is your perspective on the Bill of Guarantees under the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998 which guarantees non-censorship for the Internet? What do you think is its legal status?*

KJ: Well it's a Bill of Guarantees that was rolled out since the start of the Multimedia Super corridor and it is the foundation on which we have purported foreign investments particularly. So to me it is inviolable – it cannot be violated as far as our treatment of the internet is concerned because it is a promise that we made. And I don't know whether it has far reaching legal effect but it is definitely a moral promise that we made to the world.

*SLG: In terms of new media applications have you utilised these in order to organise any activities or lobby for a certain cause?*

KJ: Yes I have used increasingly a lot of different applications. I have experimented with new applications, some of them work, some of them don't. I have used them most recently to ask my online constituents for ideas on parliamentary sessions, what issues they want me to raise during parliament and that was quite a hit because some of them had good ideas. So that was my first



experiment in trying to organise the online constituency to do something concrete with ideas and proposals to parliament. So the efficacy of these applications really depends on how you use them, what the applications are. The two biggest applications that I use are Facebook and Twitter. Facebook – because it is generally quite popular in Malaysia as in other parts of the world and it is

a little bit more upmarket than MySpace which is more teenybopper. Facebook has a slightly more older user profile. And that has been good to organise people. Yesterday I had a live Facebook discussion – chat session for one hour, something I want to do in future. Twitter is something that I have just started. I have about 1200 followers. It is a good way to get news out quicker than writing a blog. Reading a 800 word or 1000 word entry on your blog - people just don't have the time, whereas 120 character tweet... So if you have a longer article, you can use a tiny URL. So these are the applications work – some others less so. But these are the ones that define my online strategy.

*WKC: Khairy, what are your perspectives on social networking applications and sites from a socio-cultural and political perspective, for example Facebook, twitter, blogging etc?*

KJ: Well obviously it has changed the cultural dynamics as well as the political dynamics in Malaysia.



YB Khairy Jamaluddin's web page: [www.rembau.net.my](http://www.rembau.net.my)

I don't think all these cultural networking sites have completely replaced traditional face to face social interaction – that's never been in question. But it has added a new dimension as you reach out to people who you can't see or you can't speak to. And it has created a level of trust

between politicians and citizens who choose to follow and have genuinely created a level of

comfort between them. And I don't know how successfully this can be done in Facebook and Twitter, but at least I know that I can go and I can talk to 7,000 people on Facebook , 1,200 on Twitter and they get my message and I get their feedback.

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

KJ: Well I think you have to be more succinct, more concise. I think Malaysian politicians have a tendency to overelaborate and be very verbose. I think new media disciplines you to be to the point and I think that is what people want. People don't have much time to read so many things, you have to get your point across accurately and in as short an amount of time as possible.

*SLG: Taking into account the results of the 12th General Elections in 2008, and its new media participants, do you think the Malaysian Government is likely to introduce measures to curb/limit the effects of new media on the political process?*

KJ: No I hope not. If there are moves to curb the new media it will be foolhardy and silly I think it will be counterproductive. I think some people operate in a pre-Internet mindset and that what they want to do. But personally I think it is the worst thing that could happen.

*SLG: If it were to occur, what is your stance and opinion on the matter? How would it affect Malaysia's future?*

KJ: I would vociferously be against that.

*WKC: In your view, under Prime Minister Badawi's leadership, did the national Government deal with the challenges of new media adequately?*

KJ: I think we underestimated the new media. And I think that the former PM Tun Abdullah Badawi also admitted as much after the General Election. We didn't take the new media seriously and I think it was a strategic error.

*WKC: Following on from that, Prime Minister Najib has taken a very public leadership role in engaging with new media. What is your view of his approach?*

KJ: I think it's good, I think it is a good approach. He also has a store front on the internet, he has a website, he has a blog, he has a You Tube channel, he has a Facebook channel he has a Flickr channel– his presence is there. It is a good start. I hope that his engagement with the new media continues and I hope that people are able to appreciate his good efforts.

*VT: One of the hypotheses of this report is that political engagement via new media is more advanced in Malaysia than it is currently in Australia. Do you agree with this theorem, and if so, why do you believe this is the case?*

KJ: I am not familiar with the new media scene in Australia so I won't be able to answer this question accurately. Someone told me recently that Malaysia has the largest number of blogs per capita. People were looking for alternative channels of expression. We went through decades of mainstream media geared towards guidance.... there was this feeling of let's get out and there is this pent up interest in getting things out there. So it just goes exponentially. So I think that is why Malaysia is ahead of the curve, I don't know with Australia but with some other countries definitely. Recently we had a new media practitioner coming from the US during the last presidential election. He was here after the last elections, and based on the questions he got from the floor, he was like 'oh wow, you guys are speaking a language that even people in Washington aren't speaking.' So I think Malaysia is quite advanced, yes.



The NMIC Project Team with YB Khairy Jamaluddin