



BATTY MISSION

The heady excitement of meeting the Dark Knight in person

PLUS 28

TODAY

Wednesday July 9 2008 www.todayonline.com we set you thinking

COLUMN

MARIA SIOW

China's citizens are achieving some success in taming the faceless behemoth of provincial authoritarianism in a push for social justice – but there is a limit to this tolerance. **Page 20**

COMMENT

DEADLY SCHOOLS

More than 7,000 schools collapsed during the recent Sichuan quake and it's clear shoddy construction was to blame. It's crucial to get to the bottom of the problem as we need to restore our faith in civil engineers, says NUS Prof Kog Yue Choong. **Page 21**

WORLD

HERITAGE STATUS

Great news for two historic Malaysian cities. Melaka and Penang's Georgetown will be recognised as Unesco's World Heritage sites after a seven-year campaign. **Page 12**

SPORTS

S'PORE UNFAZED

China has promised a 'clean' Olympics but Singapore is leaving no stone unturned to ensure the health of our 25-strong athletic contingent. **Page 33**

BUSINESS

SMELLING GOOD

Guidelines to make SWFs more palatable will be discussed at an IMF meeting here, today and tomorrow. **Page B1**

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POLITICS ONLINE

See you on Facebook

Ministers and MPs step up presence with online profiles

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HE FIRST used Facebook to gauge public support for Singapore's bid to host the Youth Olympics Games in 2010, and was impressed that within a few crucial weeks, membership for the group formed on the social-networking website swelled to over 5,000.

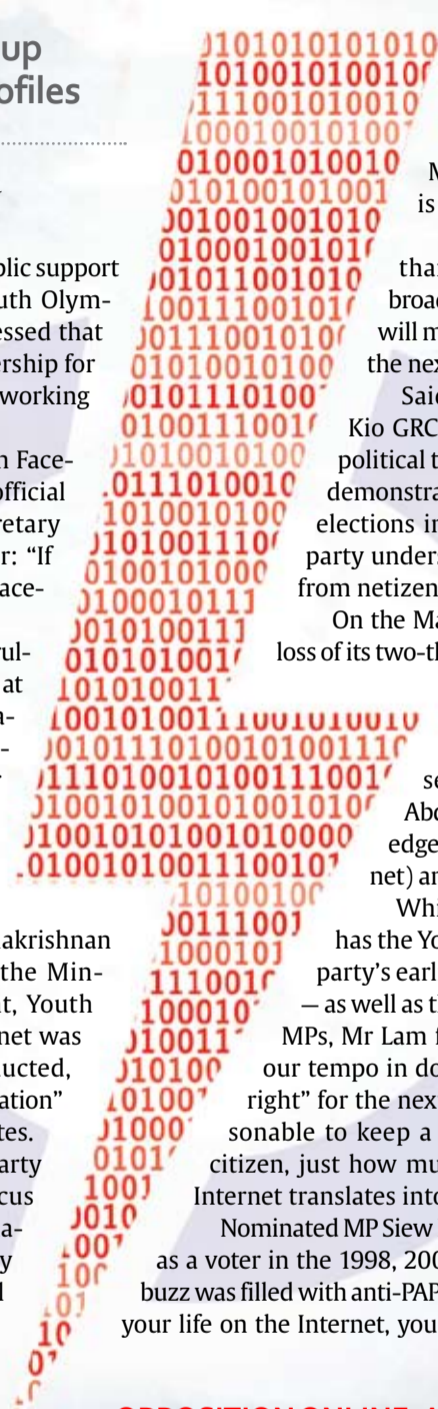
And while his own activities on Facebook are of a personal rather than official nature, Senior Parliamentary Secretary Teo Ser Luck can't help but wonder: "If translated into a political strategy, Facebook could be a powerful tool."

Certainly, the signs are that the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) – or at least, some of its elected representatives – has been stepping up its online presence of late. Foreign Minister George Yeo, who blogs at two sites, told TODAY in an email interview that he is working with some youths to set up his own Facebook profile.

Cabinet colleague Dr Vivian Balakrishnan already has one. And last week, the Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports spoke on how the Internet was changing the way politics is conducted, especially given this "YouTube generation" that demands multimedia soundbites.

Could this be a signal that the party – which has long preferred to focus its energies on its vast grassroots machinery, national and community events, dialogues and traditional media – will be intensifying its outreach online?

Some among its cadre think it should, and with some urgency.



THE WEB AND THE NEXT GE

While tight-lipped on whether a taskforce within the party is looking into the Internet specifically, Mr Teo did say "the party leadership" is taking the Internet seriously.

It's clear to see why, when more than eight in 10 households are on broadband, and such wired Singaporeans will make up the bulk of younger voters in the next General Election, due by 2011.

Said PAP MP Lam Pin Min (Ang Mio Kio GRC): "The power of the Internet as a political tool must not be underestimated as demonstrated by the experience of the recent elections in our neighbouring countries. The party understands this and takes the feedback from netizens very seriously."

On the Malaysian ruling coalition's historical loss of its two-thirds majority at the March polls, MP

Charles Chong (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC) – who believes that Internet forums are a gauge of ground sentiment – said: "Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi had acknowledged that they misjudged it (the Internet) and were worse off as a result."

While Singapore's ruling party already has the Young PAP online forum – one of the party's earliest attempts to engage cyberspace – as well as the blog maintained by its post-1965 MPs, Mr Lam felt that the party should "step up our tempo in double-quick time" to "set the stage right" for the next GE. But while it would seem reasonable to keep a finger on the pulse of the wired citizen, just how much of the "flash and bang" of the Internet translates into real life – particularly votes?

Nominated MP Siew Kum Hong pointed to his experience as a voter in the 1998, 2001 and 2006 GEs, where the online buzz was filled with anti-PAP rhetoric and sentiment. "If you lived your life on the Internet, you would believe that the opposition

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» OPPOSITION ONLINE, A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD? 3

YENYOK

Girl found in pool of blood

LEONG WEE KEAT

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THE bushes surrounding a PUB substation at Blk 154, Ang Mo Kio Ave 5, was the scene of a gruesome find yesterday: The body of an 18-year-old female face-up in a pool of blood.

The victim, known only as Jeevitha, was clad in a black sleeveless top and red shorts, and had neck and upper body injuries. She was pronounced dead at the scene at 7.25am.

About 10 hours later, a 22-year-old Indian man was arrested in connection with the murder as he returned from Malaysia.

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Man leaves plane, causing flight delay

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FIRST, he said he wanted to leave the aircraft because his friend was not on board. Then, he said he needed to leave to settle personal matters.

In the end, the insistence of a Tiger Airways passenger to get off the plane at the very last minute resulted in security sweeps that forced all the other passengers to disembark twice in the span of two hours before the flight could continue.

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