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Political site-seeing

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WHAT'S in a website?

A great deal, if Umno's leap into cyberspace is anything to go by.

While Opposition parties were making full use of the wide world of webs, Umno's site remained elusive at best.

But two weeks ago, Umno's new cyber-look (www.umno-online.com) was launched by party president Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the extraordinary general assembly.

Many would say the wait has been worth it. The new site is fast, sleek, pleasant to look at and easy to navigate.

It is also quick on the uptake, with a detailed analysis of the Opposition win at Lunas appearing the day after the by-election.

The lead-up to Lunas promised a live webcast of proceedings, but for some reason, a day before voting, the option was removed. Still, the site is essentially news-driven, which gives it a certain velocity, so popular in these fast-flowing days.

Besides its own news items, the site has links to both local and foreign news sites such as New York Times, Wall Street Journal and CNN.

Polls are also carried out, the most recent being (of course) on who would triumph at Lunas.

There is the requisite history and ideology of the party, but there is also an Umno Diary, listing imminent party activities, and listings of the individual schedules of party leaders. There is even web radio and TV.

The clean, clear look of the site, its speed, and its high level of "clickability" (there is lots to click on and do here) are all major plus points. So is the recent announcement that Dr Mahathir might hold a cyber question-and-answer session some time this month.

However, as the site is only in Bahasa Malaysia, the possibility of an international audience is greatly reduced.

The DAP's website, in action now for nearly five years, is by contrast somewhat spare in appearance.

Nevertheless, it too is speedy, and though short on pictures and graphics, its appearance is neat and uncluttered.

Party policy, ideology and activities form the main content - the site is not news-driven, but one can join the bunga raya mailing list where ideas and comments can be exchanged.

The site, also easily navigable, has several very useful links to Government agencies and local and international non-governmental organisations. The webmasters have even placed 12 Malaysian statutes online for easy reference. The DAP site can be accessed in English, Bahasa Malaysia and Mandarin. (www.malaysia.net/dap/) Pas'

site (www.parti-pas.org), like Umno's, is very much news-driven. Here, hard work is in abundant evidence. It contains just about everything you would want to know about the party - people, policies and current party politics. There are also sizeable sections on the women's and youth wings.

Responses are quickly posted: a day after Lunas, an article, complete with political caricature, appeared, detailing the Opposition victory.

Here, the surfer can find endless links to articles, and sites reflecting Pas' brand of Islam. The party has even added online radio and television, and the English and Bahasa Malaysia content is more or less equal.

Like the DAP, MCA (www.mca.org.my) has chosen to stay away from hard

news on its site, concentrating instead on party news and activities. Polls are held, the most recent being "Why do people take Ecstasy?"

The layout is pleasing though slightly cluttered, but the best idea is the Missing Persons link, which is a list of over 50 people who have gone missing since 1992. Click on a name and the person's details will show up along with a photograph and the numbers of people to contact.

The MIC website, which is in English, is currently closed for upgrading. For those who would like to keep an eye out for it in the future, the address is www.mic.org.my

And finally, the Rakan Muda website (www.rakanmuda.org). Though Rakan Muda is not a political party, it brings politics and technology together in a vital area, that concerning youth.

Barely a month-and-a-half-old, the site has already had 500,000 hits and over 1,500 young people have signed up for the programmes. The site works fast, but today's young person is a demanding creature and may not be won over by this somewhat text-heavy, formal approach.

Still, Rakan Muda co-ordinators have said that the site is as yet under progress and that plans for the future include a space for a youth forum - where young people can give input directly - and links to local and international youth portals. So keep your eye on this one.

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