Online opposition: challenging media and electoral control in Singapore

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Abstract

Ever since, the internet became publicly available in Singapore, opposition parties in the city-state believed that the internet will provide them a new tool of external outreach to overcome local media bias and gain electoral leverage against the ruling People's Action Party. Ten years after the first opposition party went online, Singapore's opposition parties' online presence is small, its online external outreach weak and their electoral fortunes still unchanged. Why is this so? This paper argues that a do-it-yourself approach, technical challenges, a culture of caution and the parties' control over its members' online communications are the chief reasons why their use of the internet for external outreach has been less then optimal. Hence, even with the internet providing opposition parties an additional external outreach medium, it has not helped improve their electoral success. The paper concludes if Singapore's opposition parties are to have some plausible success during elections and contribute to a meaningful multiparty democracy in the city-state, some form of electoral reform is needed.

Key words: Singapore, elections, internet, media, opposition parties

Introduction

Early researchers studying political parties and online communications in Singapore believed that the internet will present opposition parties with a tool of external outreach that could overcome local media censorship and bias. By using this new tool of external outreach, they felt that opposition parties could mount an effective electoral challenge to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) hold on political power of nearly fifty years. For instance, one NGO compilation on Singapore's political parties, despite its scanty data about the use of the internet by opposition parties, makes a bold and challenging claim that the use of the internet by opposition parties stands to pose a challenge to the PAP government's media control (Ooi 1998). Another study, again based on limited evidence, asserts that the internet did make inroads into government media control during the 1997 general election (da Cuhna 1997). Mutalib's study of the opposition (Mutalib 2003) also stresses the importance of the internet. However, beyond scattered statements that easy access to the internet will encourage political parties to set up homepages, the writer provides no analysis of whether the new technology was likely to have any impact on the electoral fortunes of the opposition parties in Singapore.

In a 2002 study, researchers concluded that "sites" of resistance in Singapore tend to use the internet to focus attention on issues that were rejected or downplayed by traditional media (Ho, Baber and Khondker 2002, p.137, p.141). The study also highlighted that these sites used the internet to refute mainstream

statements by providing alternative explanations. However, opposition parties formed only a very small part of the study as only two parties, the Workers' Party and National Solidarity, were mentioned. Hence, the findings of this study cannot be extended convincingly to the opposition party movement as a whole. To date there has not been a single exclusive study on opposition parties and internet in Singapore. Instead only minor discussions on the topic such as those reviewed above have been recorded. These opinions about the internet and opposition parties can generally be found within specific works that discuss Singapore's general elections, the opposition or the internet. Collectively, these works demonstrate an enthusiasm about the potential the internet holds for opposition parties to overcome the local media bias, a view as we shall see in the next section is also shared by the opposition parties. But given the limitations of the above research, there is scope to undertake a more comprehensive study that looks at all opposition parties that use the internet and to evaluate whether the internet has indeed assisted these parties in Singapore to overcome the media bias and help them gain electoral leverage.

One attempt to execute such a study was undertaken by examining how political parties used the internet in the 2001 general election (Kluver 2004). According to the author of this study Singapore's political culture "has a mediating effect" on the role of the internet, and that it "plays a significant role in contextualising and limiting the effects of new media on political practice" The author argues that in Singapore, the centralised mode of governance and conservative political culture heavily influences the way the internet is used to mobilise political support and spread the message of opposition parties. As a result the opposition parties' use of the internet has not been effective, he argues. However, the study is largely based on a review of the features of political party websites. Furthermore, the actual reviews were limited to websites studied during the period of the 2001 elections, which were consulted again in 2003. Although Kluver brings up the realities of Singapore's conservative political culture, his analysis is partially undermined by the absence of primary empirical research like interviews with activists and opposition party figures. Without such interviews, researchers may not understand the background and reasons behind why opposition political party websites lack certain types of information or have a deficiency in features. These, for example, may be due to difficulties in finding proper expertise in setting up or maintaining websites or in-house communication policies that prevent the internet to be optimally used as a tool of external communication. This is one of the prime weaknesses of Kluver's study. How Kluver's study marks a shift from the earlier enthusiasm by earlier researchers about the potential the internet holds for opposition parties to a position that the internet has not been able to provide these parties with an external outreach tool that can result in a positive electoral outcome for them. Given, Kluver limited data set, this study seeks to build on his initial research and re-validate his claim by focusing exclusively on opposition parties and employing face to face in-depth interviews with party officials and webmasters of opposition parties to collate information. In this way, this paper also seeks to make available an additional data set upon which other

researchers could draw on to help us build a better understanding about opposition parties and the internet in Singapore.

Face to face interviews based on a set of structured questions were conducted with representatives of opposition parties with websites between January 2005 and May 2006 in Singapore. Before conducting the interviews, the interviewees were informed about the research project and provided with information that gave an overview of the research. Each interview took at least one hour and in most cases required longer time. Sometimes it required more than one sitting. Some follow up questions were also sent by email. Care was taken to interview at least the webmaster or the party representatives that had dealings with the party's website. Most subjects approached were cooperative and willing to spare their time. But there were some reluctance to answer questions on incidents or disagreements over control of the party website and members' external online communication. Hence, it was not always possible to elicit sufficient and accurate information on this topic, because those interviewed either did not have the knowledge, or full knowledge, or were highly reluctant to speak about them. To supplement the interviews, the websites of these political parties were browsed to collect information and media reports on opposition parties and the internet between the years 1995 and 2006 were reviewed. Additionally, interviews were also conducted with selected journalists and academics with a final round of interviews undertaken in February 2007. This researcher also used www.archive.org a well-known digital library and archive of internet sites to track and access past versions of the websites discussed in this paper.

The findings have led this paper to argue that a do-it-yourself approach, technical challenges, a culture of caution and control over its members' online communications are the chief reasons why the opposition parties' use of the internet has been less the optimal. The parties' use of the internet as a tool of external outreach to overcome the media bias has only been achieved in a limited way. But this outreach advantage has not translated into any significant electoral gains for the parties'. Hence, the belief of earlier researchers that the internet held the potential to given opposition parties a certain leverage against the ruling PAP cannot be validated. Instead, Kulver's argument that the internet has limited political value to opposition parties can be validated in a stronger and more comprehensive way with primary data drawn from the in-depth interviews undertaken in this study. The evidence suggests that changes to the electoral system are needed if the opposition parties are to improve their electoral showing against the ruling party and realise multiparty democracy in Singapore. Relying on the internet alone does not yield electoral advantage.

Opposition parties go online in time for general elections
In January 1996, *The Straits Times* reported that a number of opposition parties were planning to set up websites "in time for the General Election to ensure that they can publicise their platform and programmes directly to potential voters"

(Ibrahim, 1996). The then-secretary general of the National Solidarity Party (NSP), Yip Yew Weng, said in anticipation that the internet will give opposition parties another channel with which to engage with the public, and that "our press releases and comments are given to people unedited." The Singapore Malays National Organisation (PKMS) announced it was also planning to go online but was less ambitious, intending to start an internet account to "get a feel for the information available." Its then-deputy secretary-general Rahizan Yaacob said, "Keeping up with technology is a priority and we do not want to lose out" (Ibrahim, 1996). Opposition parties such as the SDP, NSP and PKMS did express an interest in early 1996 to go onto the internet in time for the General Election (Ibrahim, 1996) but the NSP acted first[i] and launched a home page on the Internet in early 1996 (The Straits Times, 9 March 1996). The NSP's main reason was to present "uncensored" NSP news and to present its candidates and activities during General Elections. Secretary-general Yip Yew Weng, announced at the press conference to mark the launch of the website,

> "Under the present political system, political information has always been censored, edited or even completely rejected by the press….By going into the Internet, the party can represent its views in a clear and uncensored way."

> (The Straits Times, 9 March 1996)

In December 1996 the Singapore Democratic Party launched three websites "to provide voters and residents information that would help them make 'intelligent decisions' during General Election" (The Straits Times, 7 December 1996). The three websites consisted of one that belonged to the party and one each to the two town councils then under its jurisdiction (Rodan 1998, p. 87). The town councils were Bukit Gombak and Nee Soon Central, and the aim of their websites was to "enable the SDP MPs to communicate directly with their residents" (The Straits Times, 7 December 1996). According to a statement signed by SDP chief Chee Soon Juan, the internet was,

> "a conduit for unedited and uncensored information ..so lacking in Singapore…..For too long, Singaporeans have been deprived of accurate and reliable news, especially political news, on Singapore….With the website, the SDP will do its utmost to break the PAP's control of the mass media in Singapore and improve the anaemic conditions of news coverage in this country."

> (The Straits Times, 7 December 1996).

Hence, the rationale for opposition parties that first set up their websites was for external outreach. The parties felt that they needed to use this new technology to overcome local media bias. They hoped indirectly that if the internet could help them overcome local media bias and reach out directly to the voting public, then they could gain political leverage against the ruling party in electoral terms.

The SDP after not being able to put up its elections websites in 1996 and also losing two of its seats in that election chose not to develop its own website.

Instead it used the Singaporeans For Democracy Website to carry its announcements between 1997 and 2000. It was not until the run up to the 2001 General Election, did the SDP embark on its own website. In also added an election site to it. This site listed the profiles of the SDP candidates who contested in one single member constituency and two five member group representative constituency. There was also some information about its five-point economic plan and another section that highlighted some key policy positions of the SDP. The website also carried the results of the elections which the SDP lost.

Records obtained through www.archive.org show that the Workers' Party (WP) website, copyrighted since 1999, carried information about the party history and its officials. The website went through a revamp that was completed just before the 2001 general elections. Months before the 2001 general elections, the NSP, PKMS, SPP, SJP came to establish a formal electoral front against the PAP called the Singapore Democratic Alliance[ii] (SDA). However the SDA did not set up a separate website.

After the 2001 general elections, two SDA members, the Singapore People's Party and Singapore National Malay Organisation (PKMS), both went online in 2002. Nearer to the 2006 general elections saw further adjustments on the opposition parties' web landscape. The SDP website underwent a revamp in 2005, while the SPP and NSP finalised their upgrades in 2006. The WP also undertook the development of a separate elections site to supplement its existing site in time for the 2006 general elections. In 2007, it announced the successful completion of another revision of its main website.

General elections provide parties the momentum to first get online. Elections also form the timelines against which these parties later aim for "upgrades" and revamps of their sites. Government statistical reports and internet sources list that there are 23 registered parties but the ground reality is very much different. After ten years, only 6 opposition parties – the National Solidarity Party (NSP), Singapore Democratic Party (SDP), Singapore Malay National Organisation (PKMS), Singapore National Front (SNF), Singapore People's Party (SPP) and the Workers' Party (WP) – had set up websites. By early 2006, except for the SNF site (which had not updated information on its site since 2002), only 5 of these sites were still active (See table 1). The SDP, SPP and WP sites underwent a revamp in the run up to the 2006 general elections but overall there were no significant increases in the number of opposition party websites in Singapore. After the 2006 general elections (and at the time of writing), only the SDP and WP were active in updating their sites while the NSP and SPP updated their sites intermittently.

Table 1: Opposition party websites in Singapore

	Started	URL
National Solidarity Party	1996	http://nsp-singapore.org/

Singapore Democratic Party	2001	www.singaporedemocrat.org
Singapore Malay National Organisation (PKMS)	2002	www.geocities.com/pkms218
Singapore National Front	2002	www.snfsingapore.cjb.net
Singapore People's Party	2002	www.spp.org.sg
Workers' Party	1999	www.wp.sg

Source: Consolidated from interviews with opposition party webmasters and cross-checked with www.archive.org

The small number of opposition sites, to some extent, accurately reflects the number of opposition parties that have a membership base and are active in electoral terms. Further, the amount of information, the number of members involved in their activities, the volume of public participation in their activities further helps distinguish the major opposition parties from the rest of the pack. The websites also allow us to effectively distinguish between the impression created by the PAP government statistics of "23" which is achieved by keeping defunct parties registered on paper and the handful of opposition parties that actually operate under Singapore's rigid rules. However, the main challenge is to explain why even the few active opposition parties that have gone online have not fully exploited the potential of the internet? Has legislation surrounding political parties' online expression been a source of hindrance? Or are there other variables that researchers and observers need to consider?

Internet Regulation and Political Parties in Singapore
There are essentially two sets of legislation governing the use of the internet by political parties in Singapore. The first is the Class Licence Scheme and the other second in the Parliamentary Elections Act. The Class Licence Scheme contained in the Broadcasting Act was introduced by the then-Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) now Media Development Authority (MDA)[iii] barely six months after it was reported that a number of opposition parties were exploring the use of website for elections. Under this Scheme "all political parties, religious organisations, and other organisations and individuals with Web pages discussing religion or politics must register with the SBA" (Rodan 1998, pp. 80-81). The MDA regulatory framework which is contained in the Broadcasting (Class Licence) 2001 elaborates that,

> An Internet Content Provider who is or is determined by the Authority to be a body of persons engaged in the propagation, promotion or discussion of political or religious issues relating to Singapore on the World Wide Web through the Internet, shall register with the Authority within 14 days after the commencement of its service, or within such longer time as the Authority may permit. (Broadcasting Act, Chapter 28, Section 9)

Under this requirement websites of political parties are required through notice in writing to register as political sites. The stipulated objective of registering political websites is to "ensure" that those who run sites engaging in the discussion of

domestic politics are accountable and take responsibility for the content of their sites. Registration is touted as a simple administrative procedure. It requires content providers such as political parties to give MDA the particulars of the website and those who are responsible for the editorial content. Such details are requested of political parties every year. Known as "Registration Form B for Class Licensable Broadcasting Services", licensees (in this case political parties registered in Singapore) are to comply with strict conditions : examples include giving MDA "14 days prior written notice before terminating its provision of the website(s)"; MDA is also to be notified: "7 days in advance of any change in the nature of the website(s)" and "no later than 7 days after any change in the editor(s), editorial teams(s), web publisher(s) or web host(s)", as well as "no later than 14 days after any other change in the information provided" in the registration form.

Other details that reveal the depth of information required by the Singapore government are found in an "annexure" to the form which requires particulars such as the commencement date(s) of the parties' website(s), subscription rates charged, IP address(es), title(s) in English and other languages, and languages that the websites' contents are in. It goes further by requiring registrants to "state nature of content in detail and indicate target audience", name and contact details of the "Web Publisher (the person or organization responsible for producing and packaging the website)" and the "Web Host (the person or organization who owns the server on which the website is carried or hosted, if different from Web Publisher)".

Not least, the MDA also makes both the Central Executive Committee (or equivalent) of the political party and the entire editorial team of a website responsible for its contents: they have to sign a declaration in which they jointly register the websites and agree to "accept full responsibility for the contents on the website(s) and shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that such contents comply with the laws of Singapore". The imposition of these kinds of conditions is to ensure that both the political executives of the party and the appointed editors of the sites are held accountable even though some executive committee members may have nothing to do with the daily running of the site. In some ways it is similar to guidelines that regulate the working of party publications (see Gomez 2006a). In the case of party publications, the clear lines of legal accountability has allowed representatives of the ruling PAP to undertake defamation laws suits against selected opposition parties and its members that can put all executive committee members and the party at financial, bankruptcy and jail term risks.

This was case of the Tamil Language Week article in the WP newspaper *The Hammer* in 1995 and the case of the SDP's *New Demokrat* in 2006 (see Gomez 2006a) that resulted in the party leaders being sued, declared bankrupt and in the case of JB Jeyaretnam then secretary-general of the WP to lose his parliamentary seat. We will see later in this paper the current leader of the WP,

Low Thia Khiang also raises this point when he explains the rationale for imposing restrictions on the participation of WP Central Executive Committee (CEC) members at internet forums (Kwek and Peh 2006c). Hence the Class Licence Scheme creates a sense of caution among party leaders that the internet might open a vulnerable front towards them or individual members of the CEC, especially if they are elected as Member of Parliament (who if made bankrupt can lose their parliamentary seat) or affect the party as a whole. Although the Class Licence Scheme compelled political parties to register and had a "psychological effect" it did not curb the day-to-day online activities of political parties in anyway. It was the Parliamentary Elections Act that was actively employed to reel in the online campaign activities of opposition parties during elections.

In late 1996, the opposition parties which had gone online faced their first obstacle during the run up to the 1997 elections. In December 1996 the NSP posted information about its candidates on its site which it had set up earlier in the year. As highlighted earlier, the Singapore Democratic Party launched three websites which also contained the bio data of its candidates. After the candidate nomination day for the general election on January 1997 (Rodan 1998, p. 87), the then-Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) told the SDP and the NSP to remove the biodata and posters of its election candidates in December because it had "contravened some parts of the Parliamentary Elections Act" (The Straits Times, 29 December 1996), and that the rules did not provide for campaigning on the internet, although it did not prohibit it either (Rodan 1998, p. 87). The SBA faxed the then-NSP president Tan Chee Kien's office on 28 December asking him to remove all information about the party's candidates from its website by 1 pm (The Straits Times, 29 December 1996). According to NSP secretary-general Steve Chia, the SBA gave notice to the NSP because the party was deemed by the SBA to have gone beyond the accepted limits of the party's constituency when using the internet for election advertising. The election campaign rules stated that campaign materials for a particular constituency should be located within the boundaries of the targeted constituency. However the website's virtual outreach beyond the geographical boundary of the constituency was seen as contravening the campaign rules[iv]. What was interesting was that the laws were either unclear or silent about internet campaigning at that time, and it was up to political actors like the SDP and the NSP to explore options such as using the internet for outreach. However the PAP government chose to restrict the use of the internet for election campaigning.

In 2001 amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act were introduced to provide some clarity to online campaigning. Under this Act, certain forms of online campaigning by political parties were now allowed, while other features were disallowed. New legislations governing online campaigning by political parties were introduced via amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act that came into effect on 17 October 2001. The amendments introduced some parameters to permissible online election campaigning by political parties. This

amendment stipulated the types of "election advertising" and its very broad definition defines election advertising as material that "can reasonably be regarded" to help secure the electoral success of any political party or candidate, or to improve the standing of any of these parties or candidates (The Straits Times, 14 August 2001).

The amended rules stated what was allowed and what was disallowed, and included a ban on non-party political websites from campaigning. The amendments allow websites belonging to political parties to publish posters, manifestos, candidate profiles, party profiles and publications; calls for members, volunteers or canvassers; emails promoting or opposing a party or candidate; notices of meetings or constituency visits; chatrooms and discussion forums, as well as hypertext links to sites without election advertising or with permitted forms of election advertising. The features that are specifically disallowed are election surveys during the election period, appeals for election funds, and "facilities allowing visitors to search the site for disallowed forms of election advertising" (Tan, 2001). Moderators must be appointed for chatrooms and discussion forums during the election and keep logs of all messages. There are also very specific rules which require that when political parties, candidates and their election agents send out emails and SMS messages containing "election advertising" during an election, they "must indicate who is sending the messages and on whose behalf they are sent", and such messages must not be in the form of a "chain-letter" that asks the receiver to pass them on to others (Tan, 2001). The rules are in force during the election period – from the time the "writ of election" is issued until the close of the last polling station on Polling Day. For this period also, non-party political sites are prohibited from carrying party banners and candidate profiles, as well as publishing campaign materials or running election advertisements (Tan, 2001; The Straits Times, 14 August 2001). Election advertising is banned on polling day and this applies to advertising on the Internet (The Straits Times, 14 August 2001), as stated in Section 78B.

Although PEA amendments made online campaigning legal, the take up rate was actually low and the features employed on such sites were basic. The change in law did not significantly motivate opposition parties to rush towards an online presence. For instance the SDP was the only opposition party whose website also contained a sub-site specifically covering the 2001 elections (http://www.singaporedemocrat.org/classic/informations/ge2001/index.html). There were no major infringements in the run up to the November 2001 general elections except that the Workers' Party received a letter in October 2001 from the Elections Department, via express delivery, asking them to remove a page containing a request for political donations. The new laws "prohibited political parties from soliciting funds for election purposes online". The WP not only removed the page, it also launched their revamped website – without that page – not long after the notice was given (The Straits Times, 21 October 2001).

In 2006 the PAP government did not introduce new legislation but about a month before the general elections, it "clarified" that the existing rules will continue to affect internet electioneering. In particular, it identified podcasts and vodcasts as not being among the "positive list" of regulations passed in 2001 that forbid the streaming of 'explicit political content' by political parties or individuals (The Straits Times, 4 April 2006). Pictures of rallies were also not allowed to be posted (The Straits Times, 5 April 2006).The PAP government also announced that blogs that 'persistently propagate, promote or circulate political issues relating to Singapore' might be asked to register and remove material deemed to election advertising (Chia, Low and Luo, 2006). Individual sites and blogs were required to register when the MDA asks them to do so. And during the election period those registered will not allowed to provide material that is deemed to be election advertising (The Straits Times, 4 April 2006). It was further elaborated that those likely to be compelled to be registered would be those that consistently support or criticize political parties and their candidates (The Straits Times, 5 April 2006).

The rules surrounding podcasting affected the Singapore Democratic Party (SDP) which had already begun to put up podcasts sometime before the general elections. The Worker's Party which had plans to set up podcasting decided to shelve its plans (Chia, Low and Luo, 2006). Nevertheless the SDP did upload a podcast days before nomination day. Soon after, the Elections Department issued an order to remove the audio files and podcasts on the SDP website, with which it complied. Under Section 78A of the Parliamentary Elections Act, the punishment is a fine not exceeding SGD $1000 or a jail term of not more than 12 months or both (Lee 2006). In response, media watch NGO, Reporters Without Borders, issued a statement denouncing the move by the Elections Department, saying that this amounted to clamping down on freedom of expression (The Straits Times, 29 April 2006). Apart from the incident surrounding the SDP podcast no other opposition website has been informed that they had breached election advertising rules in the 2006 general elections.

Although the PAP government initially used the Parliamentary Election Act in 1996 to prevent opposition parties to use the internet to put information about their candidates, by 2001 the Act was amended to allow for it. In 2006, it clarified that podcasts, videocast and rally photos could not be published during election campaign period. These rules that govern online electoral campaigning by political parties do place certain restrictions on parties during the electoral campaign period. When it comes to day to day operations, there were no restrictions, except the requirement for pre-registration. Yet many opposition parties were slow in setting up their websites and did not exploit those features that were not forbidden during the election period during non-elections times. So if the legislation was not what held back the full exploitation of the internet by opposition parties, what did?

"Do-it-yourself" approach of opposition party websites

The various opposition parties' share a common ground in that their website developments were driven by individual youth members with ages ranging from their twenties to thirties, and who are generally information technology-savvy, personally motivated, and willing to try new ideas. The initial stages of development were characterised by a "do-it-yourself" approach of design and home page construction where the day-to-day running of the websites are executed "in-house" by volunteers or members with web hosting undertaken by a commercial company. After the initial implementation, "upgrades" and improvements to the websites are often executed during the run up to the next general elections.

In an interview with Steve Chia, secretary-general of the NSP, he revealed that work towards the party website began when he first proposed it at a central executive committee meeting in 1996 and encountered no resistance from the other committee members[v]. The cost was relatively inexpensive – "about US$25 per month for hosting, and no set-up or design fees were involved then"[vi]. Steve then proceeded to build it up himself using the Microsoft programme "Front Page" as the party did not have anyone competent enough to do it[vii]. The website was essentially a "do-it-yourself" job which was characteristic of such endeavours by all the opposition parties during their start up stage. Cost was a factor because web designers then were asking for a substantial amount of money. In 1996, the NSP had to initially contend with a $4,000 start-up cost to design the pages, in addition to the costs of the hosting service, updating the contents and log-on time. At that time, NSP's then-secretary-general Yip Yew Weng said that these costs did not make it cheap for opposition parties to go online (Ibrahim, 1996).

After its initial attempt to put up websites in late 1996 was disallowed, the SDP set up its own site in the run up to the 2001 General Election. This time the website was created by a member of its Youth Wing named Bryan Lim. The SDP website underwent a revamp in 2005. The new site was built by internet activist Yap Keng Ho on a voluntary basis with the hosting of the site done by an internet company in Singapore[viii]. Yap was behind the idea of pod casting for which the SDP received publicity in the local media when it launched its first internet radio broadcast in August 2005 (The Straits Times, 6 August 2005). Calling it RadioSDP, an audio file was made available for download on its website in which messages can be made available directly to the public by way of audio files, known as pod casts.

The WP website was first set up in 1999 by Low Thia Khiang, then the assistant secretary-general. The site was a static one that Low designed using Frontpage, managed it and ran its daily operations. The WP website got a shot in the arm in 2001 when Yaw Shin Leong, 24, and James Gomez, 36, of the Think Centre[ix] aged joined the Workers' Party. Both and were reported to be involved in work to update the WP's website (The Straits Times, 21 August 2001). After Yaw was appointed the webmaster in late 2001, he obtained a friend's help to revamp the

website in order to prepare for the 2001 general election, based on a "simple" Content Management System[x]. The Workers' Party website steadily grew in the next few years with the volunteer work of these new members who would add improvement in terms of features and content to the site. Much of the features of the website were developed in-house during this period. In 2002 another member from Think Centre Melvin Tan aged 28 joined the WP and also contributed to the website development, a couple of years later Goh Meng Seng a well-known internet forum participant also contributed to the WP's website development.

The SPP website was developed in 2002 because the party's assistant secretary-general, Desmond Lim, advocated the idea due to his personal interest and background in telecommunications. Initially built by students at a $500 start-up cost and $20 for every update per page, Lim eventually took over the maintenance and updating of the website himself as the costs accumulated. At one point updating was outsourced to an external volunteer based service, but after an incident where the site was shut down because of an abrupt termination by the volunteer, Lim decided that a proper investment in technology was necessary and hence decided to fund some of the revamps himself. The website went through a third revamp in the run up to the 2006 general elections. There are currently three people, including Lim, managing the website[xi].

The Singapore National Malay Organisation (PKMS) website was built by party members using basic software and skills, and on a small budget[xii]. Singapore National Malay Organisation (PKMS), went online in 2002 and uses free web space provided by geocities. Since it is hosted on a free domain, the viewer is faced with Yahoo! and Geocities pop-up advertisements on the homepage which overall makes it look amateurish. The Singapore National Front (SNF) is a breakaway from PKMS and was registered in 1991. The homepage of the Singapore National Front is even more amateurish and badly designed; information is meagre and the layout and features are basic and distracting. The site has not had new information upload in its News section since 2002. The two Malay-based parties have information both in English and Malay.

Overall the take rate of the internet by opposition parties was slow but steady. The more established parties with online presence carried out further upgrades. Yet most of the upgrades were done by free-lancers and aspiring web developers whose low cost the opposition parties were willing pay. For instance the NSP website went through several revamps. Most of the technological development was initially done in-house, but the NSP eventually decided to get some professional help. One was after the 1997 General Election, and the next one was done when NSP secretary-general Steve Chia found an American company to host the party's website. The company closed down within a year of the NSP contracting it, and the party approached new vendors for a fourth version of their site. According to Chia, as the technology improved and websites could be built "better for cheaper", those based on an active Content Management System could "now be built for less than $2000", and are also

"simpler and neater" [xiii]. Hence, the NSP settled in August 2005 for former Think Centre member, Michael Cheng[xiv], a free lance web developer and designer to construct and host its website.

Similarly in late 2005, the WP decided on the redevelopment of its website into a professional one by engaging a vendor. A random internet search for a number of website development companies based in Singapore, specifically requesting the use of Content Management Systems as the interface for uploading data, yielded some leads. Using this information, the party sent queries to about a dozen vendors, and seven replied, including Michael Cheng. One company, Ape Communications Pte Ltd, had initially considered the WP's request, but then turned it down, the contact person saying that her boss had "mentioned that the company is apolitical and would like to pull out from this project"[xv]. A few of them replied with quotations, the most expensive being $15,000 from a company called Innerval Design & Print[xvi]. Representatives from two prospective vendors, Formul8 Pte Ltd and Anhance Pte Ltd, met with WP representatives and showed strong interest in taking up the project, even though neither had experience setting up a website for a political party. Both had previously dealt with commercial clients or with government and state agencies. The two companies eventually decided not to undertake the project citing time and scheduling conflicts[xvii]. Finally, the WP chose Michael Cheng to do this task who quoted the lowest price of $2,800 for the required development cost, not including web hosting[xviii]. However, Michael Cheng only completed part of the agreed assignment, the WP had to find a replacement developer to complete the task[xix].

As a result of the low level of technical expertise, lack of full time human resources and expertise, attacks from hackers and domain name hijacking became another source of problems for the opposition sites. In late June 2001, the NSP reported to the media that hackers had infiltrated one of its mail lists hosted on yahoo groups and deleted some 8000 names. It speculated that the culprits hacked into the webmasters personal computer and accessed his password (Agence France Presse, 28 June 2001). The Workers' Party website like other opposition party websites was not impervious to hackers. In December 2002 it sustained a hackers' attack on its server's web manager. This attack was part of a world wide attack on all "worker's party" sites that saw the index page of the site defaced by the cartoon character "Smurf". This prompted the party's webmasters to set up web security and use firewalls to prevent remote access to login information on their personal computers.

In June 2003, it was reported that the SDP website hosted on the url www.singaporedemocrats.org was turned into a pornographic website called Mature Sex (The Straits Times, 18 June 2003). According to inside sources, the SDP had failed to renew it web address in time leaving it to open for another party to 'hijack' the domain name. This can happen if websites do not pay their bills to the web host on time even by a delay of one day. Anyone who has been monitoring the situation can then detect it and make the purchase at the point of

expiry. In the case of the SDP site, the old domain name uploaded with the words "Mature Sex" and weeks later it was build into a fee paying pornographic site. Investigations by the SDP to trace the owner of the domain name revealed that it was registered to a Polish person who when contacted refused to give up the domain name. In a press release on 17 January 2003, soon after, the party asked, "The question is why would a Pole want to take over a domain name from an opposition party in Singapore?" (Singapore Democratic Party 17 January 2003) To overcome this problem the party then had to purchase a different domain name. It did so by dropping the "s" in the word democrat. The new domain name is www.singaporedemocrat.org . At the time of writing, records at www.archive.org showed that from May 2005 the website "Mature Sex" no longer was hosted on the old domain name www.singaporedemocrats.org but the domain name was not available for registration.

Less than a year later, the SDP site was to suffer further problems when surfers "Could not connect" from the static pages to the automated pages in August 2003. The SDP website was hacked and disrupted for the second time according to SDP secretary-general Chee Soon Juan (The Straits Times, 14 August 2003). The SDP on its website on 16 August 2003 said its files had been modified and hacked into to cause a malfunction (Singapore Democrat Party 16 August 2003). It took the party about a week to get the site back on track. Although this incident was again reported as hacking, it more likely that the PHP programming that the website using had "bugs" thereby causing PHP enabled pages to crash or the SDP site lose PHP support from the web host. Hence, both from a mischief making point as well as a technical point opposition sites are especially vulnerable to web-related problems.

Overall, the do-it-yourself approach of opposition parties in Singapore kept the website features of their party sites basic, making them susceptible to technical problems and external hacking. Additionally, the absence of full time qualified webmasters also meant that most parties could not fully utilize features that are permitted by law because not much resources were dedicated to it nor did the parties have the expertise to harness the full potential of the internet. In many instances, party leaders who do not have any communications expertise attempt to direct the party's online outreach. However, this was only part of the problem. Another reason why the state of opposition party website development stands the way it does in Singapore is the political culture of caution that follows from the laws of content accountability. The registration process required by the Class Licence Scheme of political parties makes those responsible clearly identifiable, hence accountable in the case of defamation suits. This leads to extreme caution when it comes to online communications.

A culture of caution and membership restriction of online communication
All party members connected to the website of their parties noted that there is certain level of discomfort towards online communications. All have mentioned

some kind of internal opposition by older and more conservative members in their respective leaderships. This is in part due to a mixture of factors like over-caution based on traumatic political experiences that have resulted in defamation suits as highlighted earlier in the case of the WP and SDP. Additionally, anxieties about the clarity of regulations governing internet usage by political parties, as well as a technological divide between the more conservative, older members and the younger, more IT-savvy and intrepid members of each party contribute towards this problem.

For instance, the SDP site displays a more news oriented approach to the information about its civil disobedience activities and its numerous legal cases including prison experiences. This approach is entirely different from how the other parties present their information. Through the interviews, this researcher learnt that the SDP is able to do this because the editorial team and those updating the website is limited to a small core people that include members of the central committee, ordinary members and volunteers[xx]. The SDP is the only party actively using more advanced features of the internet, for instance broadcasting audio, or podcasting, through its website to disseminate their party message and publicize interviews with party leaders. In late 2006, the SDP has began using videocasts as well taking advantage of the easily uploading features of YouTube. The internal functioning and management of opposition parties, like the above, are generally kept away from public and are not known to researchers who do not have direct contact with opposition representatives. But one incident which came into public attention following resignations from the WP over the party's attempts to control its member's online communication, can provide some more public verification of this problem.

In late 2006, two WP CEC members quit the party over the party's guidelines to curtail member's forum postings on the Internet. Goh Meng Seng was reported as saying that he had quit over the bad image he had caused to the party through his postings at internet forums (Kwek and Peh 2006a). Barely two weeks after his resignation, the WP introduced internet conduct guidelines for its CEC members and this prompted Chia Ti Lik another CEC member to resign in protest (Kwek and Peh 2006b). Because of the public nature of this resignation, the WP leadership responded through the local media that it had imposed guidelines on its CEC members from participating in internet forums in their own names because such forums should be kept neutral (Kwek and Peh 2006c).

However, WP leader, Low Thia Khiang's explanation highlighted the more pertinent reasons,

> Caution must be exercised by party members to avoid libel suits, he said. If a party member issues a public statement and is sued for defamation, everyone is implicated, not just the one person.
>
> (Kwek and Peh 2006c)

This view was not shared by the younger member Chia Tik Lik who resigned arguing that being too cautious amounted to 'paying lip' service to the call for alternative view, checks and balances. He instead lamented,

> The opposition at the moment does not live up to its role. It is too silent or too restrained in its criticism of the Government.

<div align="right">(Kwek and Peh 2006c)</div>

This incident above with the WP was not something that emerged suddenly, the issue of control over the party and its members' online communication had been brewing for sometime[xxi]. Ever since the WP had an injection of net savvy youths that contributed towards its website development and external communications the youth members have taken the lead almost unilaterally to get the message across the Net. As a result, throughout the several years preceding, the WP had internally at several of its CEC meetings introduced and amended internet guidelines to centralise control. It also appointed webmasters who had to go through a tiered approval process and at times to get the final clearance from the secretary-general Low Thia Khiang before posting information on the internet. In two party newsletters to members in September 2006, the WP informed that only authorised personnel from the party could photograph or film public outreach activities. Further that if members wanted to upload photos onto their blogs, only those published on the WP website could be used (The Workers Party of Singapore, 2006). Thereby providing further evidence of the WP's desire to control and frame how external outreach is conducted online by its members.

If we look back further to the WP's web history we can also note the following. Although the WP website from 1999 did carry appeals for funds to help JB Jeyaretnam[xxii], then secretary-general of the Workers' Party to face his bankruptcy charges, much of the articles related to the legal cases of Jeyaretnam, while he was still the secretary-general were carried on the Singaporeans for Democracy (SFD) site. Apart from information and report about his legal cases, other information such as the launch of his books was also carried on the SFD site. The Singapore-Window website also carried a more comprehensive archive of articles and reviews of his legal cases and other related matters since 1997 under the header "Jeyaretnam trials and tribulations" (http://www.singapore-window.org/jeyapage.htm). When the Think Centre started its operations it too started to carry information and press releases from Jeyaretnam. More Jeyaretnam specific information was carried when he stepped down as secretary-general of the Workers' Party in 2001. The above shows even when JB Jeyaretnam was secretary-general much of his legal battles as a result of his political involvement where not carried on the WP website then under the direction of Low Thia Khiang. This is unlike the case for Chee Soon Juan and the SDP.

A principle reason for the above caution with regards to using the internet as a tool for external communication as highlighted in the WP case is the fear of defamation suits. As we saw earlier the internet registration guidelines make the whole CEC and all web editorial personnel liable for the content on the website. Further if a party has an elected MP, the prospect of he or her losing their seat through possible financial loss and bankruptcy proceedings make the caution more acute. Additionally most opposition political parties are held back by tensions between older and more conservative members who are less open to new communications technology, while the younger members are more willing to experiment and take risks. Even when there is support, the use of the internet by opposition political parties is often dependant on the capacity of young members within the opposition movement to take the lead and push the idea through. Given the above issues, did the internet fulfil the initial hope the opposition parties placed on it as tool of external communication and electoral leverage?

The internet as an external outreach tool for opposition parties
When opposition parties went online they had one main expectation. They felt the medium will give them directly access to voters to put out their information. And by presenting their information directly to the voters, they felt it will increase their chances during the elections. Did the internet allow opposition parties external outreach? The opposition parties were certainly able to attract external attention to the information they put out on their websites. As we can see from the incidents cited in this paper the first and foremost were the regulatory authorities. There is certainly ample evidence that they were monitoring the opposition websites and actively regulating them especially with regards to election advertising as it was in the case of the NSP and SDP in 1997, the WP in 2001 and the SDP again in 2006 over the issue of uploading a podcast.

The ruling PAP also took into account the information that opposition parties had on their website and used it to its attack opponents. For instance, in 2004 in arguments about the circumstances behind Chee Soon Juan's absence at a court hearing during which Lee Kuan Yew (Mentor Minister) and Goh Chok Tong (Senior Minister) of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) sought US $500, 000 in damages from him for libel. The SDP posted an article entitled, "Just who is avoiding whom?" to make information about the discrepancies in the change of dates by the courts available to the public. Davinder Singh, the lawyer for Lee and Goh and himself also a PAP MP stated in court that "These scandalous attacks (referring to the SDP postings) were published on the SDP website for the world to read and repeat. They were designed to attract maximum attention." (Chia, Straits Times, 1 October 2004).

At this stage we do not know whether the SDP website notices posted since 2003 were indeed effective as claimed by Singh or whether they reached a large number of people. But by revealing its exasperation over what was being posted onto the SDP website, the PAP indirectly draws attention to its anxiety over what

the internet is now offering the opposition. Until the arrival of the internet, the PAP government had complete control over the all forms of media, but the internet appears to have removed this monopoly and introduced a new equation into the media landscape. Information that previously was not available for public scrutiny in the mainstream media is now being ventilated on the internet.

While the above is the unintended outcomes of going online, are other developments that are closer to the initial aspirations of the opposition parties? Interviews with journalists and former journalists from the Singapore media revealed that more young journalists are turning to the internet, for instance to opposition party websites for information[xxiii], however the problem is the quality of information. Several journalists indicated that the presence of the opposition websites do not increase accessibility to opposition parties. While elections cause journalists to access opposition parties more, the practice on a day -to-day basis is low. The fundamental problem with opposition party websites is that they only have basic information. Journalists say that opposition parties in Singapore have a fear of revealing too much[xxiv].

Whether a party website is effective depends on its content. The website can provide the basic introduction to new visitors who want to know about the party and want to keep track of party's events and activities. It is an avenue for the party to share its news and views with the public. This is the main use of website by most of the opposition parties. The general issue with these websites is that they are quite static. These parties don't have sufficient new content as they do not engage the journalists or the public on matters of concern frequently enough or in a manner to attract visitors to their site. Unless the website carries information that is a primary news source raising attention of certain events, issues, or statements regarding the party, visitors, journalist and the public alike are not likely to visit the party website to find out the details. The root reason is that the party leadership contrary to initial claims, does not want to seek publicity or do not have the desire to raise socio-political issues in a rigours manner for fear of political reprisals that may lead to bankruptcy suits.

The SDP is the only opposition party that adopts a very different approach. It eagerly seeks publicity and exploits any current "hot" issues to confront PAP. The website is a very important tool for it to post news on miscarriages of justice, human rights abuses, civil disobedience acts, etc. Because of these high profile news, commentaries and press statements, the SDP website is content rich and updated frequently to attract frequent visitors. While the SDP may attract visitors to its website, it does not necessarily translate into material support like membership or candidate gains. For instance we can see from the information below in the next section the number of candidates the SDP has fielded in the last general elections has fallen. It remains to be seen how this will evolve with time and the impact it will have on SDP's activities in the future.

Thus, the main challenge here is to explain if the access to opposition party information, however basic by young journalists, amounts to an increase in the volume and quality of outreach that will have the kind of political impact against the ruling party that the opposition parties hoped for. The use of website to post news and press statements have the effect of forcing the newspaper to cover stories it might otherwise skip. Even though the information most of the opposition political parties put up may not be cutting edge enough to compel the media to report on them. For instance opposition parties put on notices for membership recruitment and volunteers, messages of support from members of the public, announcements for candidate recruitment, run online polls and ask for feedback. But in spite of this form of outreach, with some of this sometimes making it onto the mainstream local media, the impact on the electoral outcome which what the opposition parties had hoped the internet will provide them with has not been forthcoming.

Under the current circumstances, opposition parties are not effective because they cannot get their message out in the manner they present them on their websites. In fact, it is unclear if they can even help their individual members and candidates gain the kind of national profile that will help them in the elections. The opposition parties are also not able to put out alternative information in a timely and efficient way. Even, if they did put some information out it is not clear that the public or any target audience will read them and act on them. In 2006, it was the citizen blogs that were able to get the message out albeit in also in a small way (see Gomez 2006b). In sum, the websites may be effective in publicising a party's view on certain issues, but it may not be that effective in attracting readership unless the website carries content that is engaging the public on matters of concern and shares common values the readers agree with. In this context, what have the consequences been on the electoral fortunes of the opposition political parties that had gone online?

Opposition parties' websites' impact on electoral results
Overall, in electoral terms there has been real no impact ever since the opposition parties started to go online from 1996. For instance, in terms of votes cast for the various opposition parties that had websites leading up to the 1997 general elections there seems to be no correlation in the rise and fall of their share of the valid votes cast in their favour. For instance the SDP's share of their votes has been constantly declining even though it has had a web presence after 1997 general at the SFD website and later its own website since 2001. For the WP its website was set up in 1999 yet its vote share fluctuated drastically by dipping significantly in 2001 and to increase about 2.% points over its 1997 vote share. For the SDA, whose component parties that have a website are the NSP, SPP and PKMs, their combined vote share has been edging up in low single digit percentage points. Therefore there is no singular voter share pattern that holds all the opposition parties together.

Table 2: Percentage of votes for opposition parties with websites

	1997	2001	2006
National Solidarity Party	6.7%	-	-
Singapore Democratic Alliance	-	12.%	13.0%
Singapore Democratic Party	10.6%	8.1%	4.1%
Singapore People's Party	2.3%	-	-
Workers' Party	14.2%	3.0%	16.3%

Source: Complied from the Elections Department website (http://www.elections.gv.sg/)

The wide discrepancies between parties becomes clearer if we look at the number of parliamentary seats (both single and group constituency seats) contested by opposition party with websites. In the case of the SDP the drop in the valid votes cast corresponds with the drop in the number of seats it had contested. It has also been the party during the last three elections that has been under the harshest political attack by the ruling party. For the SDA, their combined seats have steadily risen and this to some extend is reflected in small gradual increases in the percentages points of total number of votes casts in its favour. The WP's party sudden dip and rise in is percentage points can also be linked to the number of seats contested. Other factors include the departure of long time WP leader JB Jeyaretnam, change in leadership and election administration lapses. Again there is no clear pattern between all parties in terms of how the total number of candidates fielded can be correlated to website presence. In fact political issues more than website presence affect the rise and fall in the number of opposition party candidates fielded in the last three general elections.

Table 3: Number of parliamentary seats contested by opposition parties with websites

	1997	2001	2006
National Solidarity Party	7	-	-
Singapore Democratic Alliance	-	13	20
Singapore Democratic Party	12	11	7
Singapore People's Party	3	-	-
Workers' Party	14	2	20

Source: Complied from the Elections Department website (http://www.elections.gv.sg/)

In spite of the rise and fall of total number of candidates fielded, the sum total of opposition parties seats gained in parliament has remained fixed. The Workers' Party has had only one seat from 1997, 2001 and 2006 elections each time from the same constituency. Similarly too the SDA's component party SPP has had 1 seat each time also from the same constituency.

Table 4: Number of opposition seats in parliament

	1997	2001	2006
Singapore Democratic Party	0	0	0
Singapore People's Party (SDA)	1	1	1
Workers' Party	1	1	1

Source: Complied from the Elections Department website (http://www.elections.gv.sg/)

If we look at the percentage of votes that these seats scored, the percentages dipped for both seats in 2001 but rose in 2006 against the 1997 and 2001 figures. Again these do not highlight any pattern that shows a correlation to website presence. A change in the prime minister and the public's general dissatisfaction with the PAP government over the rising costs of living has been the main contributory reasons.

Table 5: Percentage of voters for opposition seats in parliament

	1997	2001	2006
Singapore People's Party (Potong Pasir)	55.2%	52.4%	55.8%
Workers' Party (Hougang)	58.0%	55.0%	62.7%

Source: Complied from the Elections Department website (http://www.elections.gv.sg/)

Even in terms of the non-Constituency seats, the Workers' Party had one in the 1997 and 2006 elections. While the NSP picked up this seat in 2001. None of the seat changes can be meaningfully linked to the various parties' online presence.

Table 6: Number of Non-Constituency seats in parliament

	1997	2001	2006
Singapore Democratic Alliance	-	1 (NSP)	0
Singapore Democratic Party	0	0	0
Workers' Party	1	0	1

Source: Complied from the Elections Department website (http://www.elections.gv.sg/)

The bottom line is that ten years after the internet was adopted by several of Singapore's opposition parties, the internet has not significantly altered the electoral fortunes of the opposition parties in any way over the last three general elections.

Conclusion

The use of the internet by the opposition parties allowed opposition to achieve some limited amount of outreach. However, this outreach did not allowed them to score any significant electoral advantage. It shows that a culture of caution keeps the use of the internet in check. However, it is unclear even if the use of the internet is robust that if will result in a significant change in electoral results. The problem lies in the electoral system. Unless efforts are made to reform the electoral sytem, opposition parties in Singapore are unlikely be able to contribute to multiparty democracy in Singapore.

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i But the opposition was not the first political party to go online, the Young PAP, the youth wing of the ruling People's Action Party, started its site in late 1994. Even the PAP youth wing's rationale for its website was to use it for external outreach. Its then internet committee chairman, Harold Fock was quoted as saying that there were plans to report on PAP rallies, provide pictures and snippets of events (The Straits Times, 20 January 1996). The PAP went online in late 2001 (Gomez 2002, p. 28). It has pictures and names of the Internet Sub-Committee of the HQ Executive Committee (Kluver 2004, p. 450). It has undergone at least one design change since its inception, and this includes a photo gallery and a search engine. It has one central email address, phone number and fax number on its "Contact Us" page, in addition to the names, addresses and branch chairpersons-cum-MPs of its various constituencies. It has links to the YPAP site and websites of the town councils under its jurisdiction, as well as the Women's Wing sub-site. The PAP also has a General Election 2001 sub-site where the Secretary-General's message, party manifesto, and party political broadcast are published online in the four official languages of English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil. But the ruling party does not need to use the website for these outreach purposes as they already have full access through the local mainstream media.

ii The Singapore Democratic Alliance (SDA) is an alliance of political parties in Singapore that was formed just months before the 2001 General Elections. The constituent parties are the National Solidarity Party, Singapore Malay National Organization (PKMS), Singapore People's Party and the Singapore Justice Party. After the 2006 general elections, the SDA has 1 member in parliament. He is Chiam See Tong of the Singapore People's Party.

iii In January 2003 the SBA was merged with the Films and Publications Department and the Singapore Film Commission to form the Media Development Authority (MDA) to create a "consistent approach in developing and managing the different forms of media" (Media Development Authority, 2004).

iv Interview with Steve Chia in Singapore on 29 September 2005.

v Interview with Steve Chia in Singapore on 29 September 2005.

vi Email interview with Steve Chia on 15 October 2005.

vii Interview with Steve Chia in Singapore on 29 September 2005.

viii Interview with Yap Keng Ho in Singapore on 3 October 2005.

ix Think Centre, began as an internet based human rights NGO in 1999. Its founder James Gomez and several other members later joined the Workers' Party and brought to it their online competencies. For more about the Think Centre see (Gomez 2002; George 2005).

x Email interview with Yaw Shin Leong on 13 October 2005.

xi Interview with Desmond Lim in Singapore on 28 September 2005.

xii Interview with Mohammed Rahizan, former deputy secretary-general of the PKMS on 12 October 2005.

xiii Email interview with Steve Chia on 15 October 2005.

xiv Michael Cheng was a member of the internet NGO, Think Centre in 1999 and its first webmaster who built the Centre's website. He is a self-taught internet programmer and designer and had at various times worked as a free-lancer and attempted to set up his own company. He has also been associated with developing some aspects of the PAP Youth Wing site, contributed to the websites of the now defunct Socratic Circle and other civil society organisations. Michael is familiar with the various opposition parties web needs and has been willing to undertake web development assignments at fairly low costs. However, due to his free lance nature, the need to juggle multiple projects and the low cost of his service, he has trouble completing his web assignments in a timely and holistic manner. The result has been that his projects for revamping the NSP and WP sites have seen delays and incompletion.

xv Email from Ape Communications Pte Ltd on 13 September 2005.

xvi Email from Innerval Design & Print on 20 September 2005.

xvii Emails from formul8 Pte Ltd on 22 September 2005 and Anhance Pte Ltd on 23 September 2005.

xviii Email from Michael Cheng on 26 September 2005.

xix Interview with Goh Meng Seng, former central executive council member of the Workers Party, 28 February 2007.

xx Interview with Chee Siok Chin, Singapore Democratic Party in Seoul, Korea on 19 November 2006.

xxi Interview with Chia Ti Lik, former central executive council member of the Workers Party, 1 March 2007.

xxii Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam was the Workers' Party (WP) Member of Parliament from 1981 to 2001, and lost his parliamentary seat in July 2001 due to bankruptcy. The case stemmed from an incident in 1995 when a series of lawsuits were launched against him for an article in the WP newspaper The Hammer about an event called Tamil Language Week. Jeyaretnam was the editor of the paper where the article had claimed that five Indian PAP MPs had done nothing to promote the Tamil language. The lawsuits were brought up by the five PAP MPs and eleven members of the event's Organising Committee. Jeyaretnam paid damages in full to some of the plaintiffs, but was one day late with payment to eight members of the Organising Committee. After losing a few appeals, Jeyaretnam was declared bankrupt and stripped of his seat in Parliament.

xxiii Interviews with PN Balji, Former Chief Editor, TODAY, 7 December 2005; G Sivakumaran, former Project Eyeball and Straits Times journalist, 6 December 2006; and Ahmad Osman, former Straits Times journalist, 2 March 2007.

xxiv Interviews with Sharon Vasoo, former Straits Times journalist, currently at TODAY, 7 December 2006; Lee Ching Wern, journalist, TODAY, 6 December 2006.

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