

VIRTUAL BUZZ

Bahrain has a vibrant blogosphere and recently, the Kingdom hosted its first international bloggers meet

■ BY RAJEEV NAIR

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HEY ARE ABOUT NEWS, VIEWS AND all that juice. And that is precisely why web blogs, better known as blogs, have exploded out of their virtual homes and sailed into mainstream consciousness.

An interactive diary of the Internet age, a blog bears the stamp of its creator. From wacky to wicked and silly to sly; from intelligent to garbled and hilarious to heinous, blogs come in all kinds.

But as bottom lines go, blogs are about the written word. Blogging too hinges on the art of writing. Shock or awe — the right word makes all the difference to blogs.

But thanks to their very nature, blogs have the ability to be seen, heard, read, distributed and debated without most of the shackles that come with print or audio visual media. That is, if they aren't clamped down and "blocked."

Bahrain, not surprisingly, leads the Gulf region in the sheer dynamism that goes on in its blogosphere. And its blogs cover the spectrum of topics — politics, personal, music... or, as most blogs tend to be, random ramblings including ample doses of self-celebration.

For the more seasoned players, blogs have become a way of life. Why,



PIONEER: Mahmood N. Al Yousif

Bahrain boasts a blogger, who is recognised at malls and requested for autographs. But Mahmood N. Al Yousif, managing director of Gulf Broadcast and Professional Systems, truly deserves every bit of adulation that comes his way for being a blogger.

For one, he does not resort to the easy way out in blogging. He doesn't hide behind the comfort zone of anonymity, which makes him extra bold as he occasionally lashes out at issues and subjects that irk his sensitivity and sensibility.

Two, the blogging community of Bahrain is almost unanimous in its vote that Mahmood is one of the pioneers of blogging. And he took to it quite by chance, while at work with some 40 others from around the world creating a free-to-all content management system.

"My first blogs were entries to test the system," recalls Mahmood. The comments started coming in and the whole exercise snowballed into a major exercise in blogging for the former avionics engineer with Gulf Air, who also earned a pilot's licence before switching to professional broadcast projects.

But what perhaps makes Mahmood's blogs all the more "readable" is his wickedly funny copy, a straight from the heart, straight to the heart style of writing that spares no one. Visit Mahmood's den (as he calls it) and you are in there, (to use the cliché), for life.

"I don't intend to be funny," says Mahmood, as he readies for first international meet of bloggers in Bahrain. "Sometimes out of frustration, people explode, cry or laugh. I chose laughter." That innocuous-sounding statement is pretty loaded. It is also a pointer on what spurs on Mahmood to blog.

Blogging in Bahrain, observes Mahmood, has developed in a viral fashion "because it is a natural thing for people to talk. And computers have made it easy to put their talk on paper. They simply upload their thoughts... they want to respond to things that intrigue or frustrate them." Blogs, thus, might sound like a close cousin of diaries. But they aren't (see box).

Mahmood says the "openness over the past few years in Bahrain" could be one reason why many bloggers do not feel the need to take refuge under pseudonyms. "It has become a natural thing for people in Bahrain to criticise, they have lost the fear..."



BLOGGING SANS FRONTIERS: Frederik Haentjens

BLOGGERS... A WHOLE NEW WORLD



ECLECTIC EXPRESSION: One of the Bahrain blogs.