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... when viewed through the long lens of history, China's ghost towns will prove to be potholes on the path to development.

For the Baby Boomer generation, full-time retirement as a life goal is slowing losing its appeal.

Deciding to depart from accepted practice fresh questions about the appointments to hold public office at both state and federal levels as the extent of the powers of the royal in

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FORUM EDITOR | AZAM ARIS

Populism, public opinion and prime ministers

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It is a significant sign of the times that ever more ex-leaders are adopting the Internet as the preferred avenue for publicising their views. And why should they not? The advent of fast-evolving social media is as big a revolution in human history as any other in our short history on Earth. There is no more effective and immediate way of spreading one's opinions today.

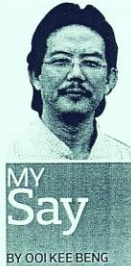
When former prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad first took to blogging several years ago, the responses were rather mixed. Many called for him to shut up — ex-leaders should keep quiet, they said. Most others did not mind, even if many of his views may have grated on their sensitivities. That's Mahathir, they said. When have his views not been controversial?

Another sign of the times manifested here is not about technical innovation. The ex-prime ministers are getting very worried about the present leadership of Malaysia. They are not alone. Every Malaysian seems worried at the moment. The ship of state is adrift, and calls for stronger leadership are being heard daily.

Mahathir may not be given to patience, but Tun Abdullah Badawi certainly has been. The whole country still remembers how he maintained an "elegant silence" (as former deputy prime minister Tun Musa Hitam baptised it) when ceaselessly attacked by Mahathir between 2005 and 2009.

Ever since Abdullah was eased out of power in April 2009 by the present prime minister, he has largely kept his peace and refrained from criticising his successor, despite having many reasons to do so.

But Pak Lah has now decided to start blogging. This is interesting on several levels.



MY Say
BY OOI KEE BENG



Abdullah has finally joined Mahathir and started blogging. Will Najib listen to his predecessors and discard his preoccupation with the poor election results of 2013?

The lure of the new and easy way of spreading one's views and influencing the world offered by technology seems to have finally proved too much even for him. And letting Mahathir monopolise the stage for retired leaders all these years cannot have been an easy condition to bear either.

But most interesting is the question, why now? Has the need for someone to steer the country away from open conflict grown too obvious to be ignored?

Given how he was undermined by Mahathir during his mandate — even after he had won the largest ever number of seats for the ruling coalition — it is poignant indeed that he blogs to say that, "The government chosen democratically must be given the chance to govern, whether it is Barisan Nasional or Pakatan Rakyat. The same goes for leaders. If a leader is chosen, let him have his chance to run the government fairly and justly."

Pak Lah's first blog entry is in Malay, suggesting

that he means most urgently that what he says is read by the Malay community. And the message is also clear, even if not strongly put. Titled, *Erti kemerdekaan dan perpaduan* (The meaning of independence and unity), he is in effect issuing a warning:

"As Malaysians, we are very proud of the diversity in our nation and we have promoted it around the world as an impressive treasure. But lately, many among us focus not on our diversity, but on our differences in political views, race, religion, and living standards. Such differences if left unchecked will escalate into fights that know no bounds."

With this, he adds his own to the small stack of important voices reacting against the racial and religious populism of recent months that have been consuming the country.

The signs of the times do not bode well. One may ask, is Abdullah the Owl of Minerva, coming out at dusk to shriek a last vain warning? That depends

on whether other respected and liberal Malay and Muslim leaders will come forth to swell the ranks of those speaking out against the climate of intolerance being created by opportunists exploiting the country's lack of political direction — opportunists who are tolerated and even being encouraged by the government.

But will Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak harken to the call of his elders, and discard his preoccupation with the poor election results of 2013? He certainly should. A mandate is a mandate, and it was officially given to him in the 13th general election, and in the Umno party election that followed.

He need not feel a crippled leader of his party; he need not feel a disappointed leader of his coalition; and he is definitely not an ex-prime minister of Malaysia. He is the leader of the country; in fact, a very pluralistic country that has difficulty handling extremism of any kind.

Malaysia will take the chair of Asean next year, and likely see the regional body mature into an economic community. Simultaneously, the country may also be a member of the UN Security Council. Given Malaysia's coming presence on the regional and world stage, Najib has ample opportunity to rise to the occasion — to turn things around to make a positive an impact on world politics and on the nation as successfully his father did.

And it wouldn't be a moment too soon. ■

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Azmin's the faith

Despite the reservationists, Selangor's Azmin Ali's ascension to the state government to the PKR's contentious protracted exercise of power by the late Khalid Ibrahim that has tutored in-fighting for the Pakatan government is a nod to the reformation of Malaysia, where having major legislative assembly has been a positive value.

Although there is no indication that the Selangor government might be challenging the PKR president Datin Serini Ismail, after she had proven the confidence of a majority of the state's political and political activists and political analysts.

This inquiry will continue to rise from the royal of a head of government has dimension in the system of democracy as conventionally understood. A more pragmatic question of Selangor who voted for general election to continue state's political culture, economic and democratic environment.

For them to continue to the Pakatan government call of governance, Azmin will be unprecedented level of responsibility of public services to undo Khalid's obsession with infrastructure projects, as Khalid's detractors. An immediate challenge to revisit the master agreement state's water sector that the signed with the federal government when Khalid was already the

fear the consequences of further regulation and higher capital requirements (under the new regulatory regime of the ECB).

water sector

A parting of the ways

The UK caused a brief moment of concern in

within its ranks. The dissent signals a desire to raise

Shinzo Abe's cabinet approval rating has moved