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Spend wisely, shop locally

THE revelry ushering in the new year has been rather subdued in the face of the problems we are facing on the financial front. But this is not the time to be faint at heart. Our collective resolve is needed now more than ever to face what is likely to be a most challenging 1998.

Take the cue from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who in his new year message, asked Malaysians not to give up in the face of economic difficulties. What was needed, he said, was for Malaysians to continue to support the government and be willing to make sacrifices to help steer the country out of this difficult period.

The ordinary man would by now have had to adjust his year-end/new-year spending patterns, finding as he does a much deflated bonus packet. Sugar, much of which comes from Australia, is now more expensive? Make do with teh-kurang-manis. Onions, which have to be imported from India and other countries, have shot up in price? Cut the garnishing on your weekend satay treat. It's quite sobering to note that we spend nearly RM10 billion on food imports annually. And imported vegetables alone cost us nearly RM300 million last year, which brings forth the question, why pick exotic sounding air-flown greens when the humble kangkong can be equally nutritious?

The present situation calls for sacrifices. Dr Mahathir led the way by taking a 10 per cent pay cut as did the Deputy Prime Minister and the rest of the Cabinet. Top civil servants also took a three per cent reduction while allowances have also been pared. Let's take the cue from them and do the same, in whatever way we can.

We've all been told to spend wisely, shop locally, import less and tighten our belts. Collective responsibility and unity in times of adversity is what is needed most now.

A journey of a thousand miles, it is said, begins with the first tiny step. The way out of our problems may lie in your next cuppa. However small a part we play in the national effort to cut, save and conserve may seem insignificant but taken collectively, will add up and make a difference: It may prove our saviour.

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