

02/01/2001

Take stock of challenges

MALAYSIANS ushered in the New Year, which some purists say is the true beginning of the third millennium, with fireworks and other forms of entertainment. It was party time and there was much to celebrate, not the least being the country's achievements and the general well-being of its citizens. It was also a celebration of the distance the people have covered over the years in bridging their racial and religious differences, living in peace and harmony.

But in the morning after, it would be prudent to take stock of our lives and where we are heading tomorrow. We should examine what we have achieved, the obstacles to some of our plans, and how to meet the challenges ahead. First and foremost, we have to ensure that the country's unity, carefully nurtured over the years and which remains one of our greatest achievements, is not threatened by any quarters.

This we have to jealously guard. Peace and harmony, so elusive in some troubled lands, are imperative if we are to survive as a nation. Unfortunately, since we have had such a long period of uninterrupted peace, some people seem to have taken this for granted.

If we adhere to one of life's basic tenets of doing things in moderation, we will in time achieve our hopes and aspirations. Indeed, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's reminder to Malaysians in his New Year message about the need to give and take in a multi-cultural community is timely.

Moderation is built on the fount of discipline, a characteristic which is as much needed as it is lacking in many of us. But having said that, we should drive ourselves even harder to maintain the order and stability we have built, and make our national integration process even more cohesive.

It was the wisdom and consideration of our forefathers that laid the cornerstone for independence. It was also their desire to see the different communities live with each other in an environment of mutual respect and tolerance that brought Malaysians together. Dreams are a million a dime and having them materialise is all the sweeter if we can rise above the realities and emerge unscathed.

As the year unfolds, Malaysians have to continue to join hands to brace themselves for what is likely to be a tough year economically. Already, there are ominous signs that the economy of the United States is slowing. There is even talk of a possible recession, a word which went out of fashion in the world's largest economy 10 years ago. This will have a significant impact on Southeast Asian countries which are still recovering from the recent financial crisis. Since the US is Malaysia's, and probably the region's, single largest export market, we cannot but be affected.

In the face of this external threat to our continued well-being, it is important that the people set aside their differences and stand firmly behind the Government as it works to minimise the impact of a potential economic slowdown. We cannot afford to stay divided. If every Malaysian were to cling tenaciously on to the simple philosophy that the value of life lies not in the length of days but in the use we make of them, there is copious hope yet that Malaysia will continue to realise its vision of a developed and prosperous country. And where its populace lives in a unique atmosphere of tranquility in which the muhibbah spirit runs strong. Let us make this our New Year resolution and work tirelessly to achieve it.

(END)

