

01/01/2002

A time for renewals and new beginnings

THAT moment has come, the final tick-tock of a passing year and the first tick-tock of a new year.

Beneath the midnight revelry, the moment envelopes us with an almost inarticulate metaphysical feeling and sharp sensations of sweet regret, despair, longing, anticipation and, most of all, hope. It comes like the fall of light on midnight water or a brief gleam caught in the folds of dark clouds. As if it were going to remain there forever. But a sudden shift and the moment slips away. And our yesterdays become a series of stills, like a row of children's alphabet blocks.

It was a year that changed the world. Much of how we remember it is anchored in Sept 11 that led to America's unilateral pursuit of made-in-USA justice and the spectre of a mini clash of civilisations. The fury of misguided faith and irrational puritanism on Sept 11 has illuminated the dangers posed by men of hollow learning who exploit and manipulate religion to advance their narrow personal and political interests.

The year 2001 has challenged the limits of our understanding on words and concepts: terrorism, tolerance, justice, Islam, Islamism and political Islam. But this challenge may yield a greater, and correct, comprehension of issues and global problems so long left in the hands of a few - `ulama with frozen mindsets and, yes, the "America first" unilateralists. There must be religious enlightenment and freedom from terrorism but neither constitutes the justification for the bloody devastation visited on Afghanistan.

The passing year mourns American failure to take a principled, balanced stand in the defence of the Palestinian cause and Israel's exploitation of the anti-terror climate by prolonging its hostile occupation of Palestinian land in blatant violation of international law. Still, there is hope for peace.

There is, though, a good outcome of Sept 11. As Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, Malaysia is recognised by many as a modern, progressive Islamic nation that remains true to Islam. Our nation represents pluralism with Islam and democracy at its core and, importantly, an Islam reconciled with modernity. An example other Muslim nations wish to follow. Our stand on terrorism, fanaticism and security laws is vindicated. And away from politics, our economic resilience in the global slowdown shows we were right in guarding our monetary sovereignty.

Long Live the King, says 2001. The national grief over the loss of beloved Almarhum Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Alhaj testifies not only to his endearing personality but also to the rakyat's reverence for the constitutional monarchy as the symbol of unity. The year was a stark reminder that our civitas must remain vigilant against instigators who would like to suppress the rise of an enlightened ummah with a critical spirit and thirst for knowledge. We must be wary of men whose dash of darkening, like the vain promise of J.K. Rowling's Professor Snape "I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and even put a stopper in death", may ignite irrational idealism.

The new year promises a new resolve and an indefatigable spirit for renewals and new beginnings. The nation has much to strive for. We know we can achieve great things as long as there is solidarity, unity, collective resolve and an unwavering support for Dr Mahathir's leadership.

It is also a new beginning for the New Straits Times where our mission

is to report news as it is, give gut-level analyses and turn unobvious subjects into zeitgeisty articles you, readers, discuss with your friends. But most of all, we want to be read by people longing to know, above all else, the truth.

Happy New Year.

(END)