

05/01/2003

Embrace change and seek solace in good old values

Ahmad A. Talib

IT'S going to be a great year, a triumphant year. The war talk, the lacklustre bourse, the string of violent crimes - all these aside, I believe 2003 is going to be a year of much merriment. It's going to be a year of hope and fulfilment.

You may not see it that way, but my faith in sense and sensibilities will prevail. The universe will once again glow with flashes of brilliance and we will be showered with blessings and happiness.

The crimes will still be here, Zainal Rampak and Mohamad Shafie B.P. Mammal will continue with their name-calling, the Pulau Batu Puteh dispute will drag on a while and we'll hear continuous outcry of rapes and khalwat. But let's not allow that to dampen our spirits in the new year. Let's move on. We live, we learn.

And Bob, an old friend who was down in the pits over the last four years, symbolises the very optimistic view of things to come. I thought his saga would have ended when he won a small contract a couple of months ago, but it didn't.

In the last month or so, Bob has been extremely busy after getting a new lifeline for his business operations. He suffered for four years and had to sell whatever assets he had just to keep his family afloat. Even his medical bills had to be taken care of by friends, not to mention food on the table sometimes.

Finally, when he managed to get his contract renewed after being sidelined for almost half a decade, Bob had to fork out some RM300,000 to show his bankers that he was a genuine businessman.

A performance bond - that's the term Bob used when explaining to me why he had to "beg, borrow or steal" to get the money deposited in a bank. At a time when he could barely make ends meet, getting RM300,000 was surely an impossible dream.

When everyone was demanding that the authorities take action against Along (illegal money lenders) for their operations, Bob turned a deaf ear and sought them out. I remember his trips to several towns to meet these gentlemen, with discussions held in coffee shops and restaurants.

One Along brought his "legal counsel" just to make sure that the deals were done in a "transparent" manner. Bob said he won a lot of respect from the men of grey high finance for having dared to meet them in the open at a time when Along were increasingly seen as a major, life-threatening nuisance.

What Bob didn't tell them was the fact that he was very desperate. He was at his wits' end. He couldn't go back to his bankers as he kept re-scheduling his loans and no bank was prepared to lend him more money when his old debts remain unserviced.

Through him, I learnt that Along charged between 15 and 20 per cent interest a month. If the amount is big, there'll be IOUs to sign with appropriate witnesses and guarantors. Alas, in Bob's case, RM300,000 was too big an amount for a single Along to provide. Getting two or three Along to finance him was an alternative Bob was not prepared to take. Furthermore, the age of syndicated Along is not with us yet ...

Just when Bob thought the end was near, that his future was over, he met an old friend, a former colleague who had ventured on his own and done well for himself. The short encounter with the old friend gave Bob the best new year present he could ever wish to get. His buddy without

reservation or hesitation promised to loan Bob the money!

Early next week, Bob's Good Samaritan will put into effect the drawdown which will enable him to go back on his glory trail. He may have made a couple of mistakes in the past and has a few regrets to show as battle scars. But like the national rugby player that he was, he subscribes to the adage that "it's not over till it's over".

This man is capable of working 20 hours at a stretch, has never shied away from getting his hands dirty and has shown the kind of determination and perseverance that would make Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad proud - a product of the New Economic Policy whose own struggle is far from over (perjuangan belum selesai).

I'm sure there are more like him. I also know of professionals and CEOs whose tenacity and never-give-up attitude will make this year a profitable and productive year for them and their teams. Like Bob, they are not short on passion and have an abundance of energy, creativity and are very resourceful. I wish them all the best ...

I recall a short verse, courtesy of an unnamed poet, articulating the philosophy of change while subscribing to time-tested values which is central to today's struggle for survival and our unending quest for excellence. Let's do it.

We embrace change
we find solace,
we value the moments
as we keep the pace,
the street party
the lights shine bright,
we cling to good old values,
we hold them tight.