

Building a culture of peace
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AS THE new year begins I'm full of hope that peace will prevail. Or at least, the quest for peace will pervade society through the minds and hearts of the communities within it.

It does not take much to believe that peace is a blessing every person deserves, be it spiritually and emotionally or physical and socially. We want peace to imbue every aspect of our lives, at home and at work. We expect the society we live in to imbibe a culture of peace.

Peace is therefore a cause worth championing; an ideal that every human group should strive towards; a right that every individual should fight for. It does not take much conscience and reason to understand that a culture of peace, not war, is what God intends for mankind.

How can it be anything else when all religions show us the way to harmony?

For most of us the journey is private and personal, manifested in amicable relationships within our family and friendship circles. Even then efforts have to be actively pursued, goodwill established and nurtured.

Outside of our domestic lives we also need to contribute a greater, more visible commitment to peace. We can no longer afford to be passive in a world where conflict has become rampant – among tribal groups where claims to territory are a cause for war; in nation states where unfairness and injustice are reasons for dissension; in societies where political differences breed hostility and hatred; among communities where prejudice and intolerance create discord.

For indeed, the inequities and inequalities in our lives sow the seeds of disharmony which, fanned by selfish interests and greed, can cause much disarray.

The road to the 13th general election has been far too long and windy, fraught with cracks and potholes that forebode danger.

Daily, we are exposed to misdeeds and wrongdoings as much as to the GTP schemes and projects poised to bring outstanding developments for Malaysia and its people.

Ironically, the vicious circle of humanity brings the bad with the good in terms of projects and people and the other variables in the nation's economic life.

Waiting for the right time for the elections and the feel-good factor among the electorate has therefore opened more windows for them to feel bad, as more and more the shortcomings of the rival factions in business and feuding parties in politics are exposed.

It is disconcerting indeed to be inundated with media reports, blog postings, Facebook comments, email and face-to-face chats about the sorry state of Malaysian society.

All is not well many people say. The voices of peace are being drowned by the cacophony of dissension.

Malaysians are fast becoming disenchanted and disillusioned as more and more cases of abuse of power and corruption are unravelled.

While the outcome is a social catharsis where the long-festered rot will be cleansed, the journey towards a clean society is a painful one. Eradicating bribery in a society where gifts and *upah* are culturally acceptable is an uphill task.

Many are still not convinced that money politics is political corruption, that it is wrong to *upah* their constituents to vote for them.

The abuse of public or political position for personal gains is done with impunity as the higher-ups in the socio-political hierarchies have traditionally allowed for the courting of favours.

"It is they who want to give us the inducements. It is not we who solicit them. So we have done no wrong," they argue.

Another overriding excuse for the high tolerance of graft and other forms of corruption is that for as long as the big fish are getting away with huge baits, the little fish will continue to grab at the smaller ones. Another vicious circle.

The picture of a society living in peace is fast becoming unreal as informal chats and formal discourses reveal a Malaysian book with a cover that is harmoniously multicultural but with pages and pages of socio-cultural bigotry and political chauvinism.

All these are being perpetuated in the political rhetoric which contradicts the fine picture we are painting of ourselves. All running contrary to the peace initiatives.

We are at the crossroads where the furtive, traditional ways of doing things to ensure a harmonious society are being challenged by modern requirements of transparency and accountability.

We are living with the paradox that conserving the old, tested ways which worked well for our forefathers is no longer sustainable.

Malaysians have to redefine a new quest for peace which is not just anti-war but for everything that strengthens the fabric of society. More people must come to the fore to lend their voices to build up an alternative discourse which promotes construction rather than destruction.

If the politicians cannot stop their bickering and mud-slinging, you and I must. We must promote a culture of peace.

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