

## The tales they tell about Year of Rat

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Article

New Sunday Times - 02/03/2008

MANY will remember the Cinderella fairy tale where rats are magically transformed into horses and a pumpkin into a golden carriage for Cinderella to ride to the ball and meet her Prince Charming. Cinderella and the prince lived happily ever after.

And how would your 2008 Year of the Rat be? Well, it all depends on who your favourite geomancer is.

The one that I came across predicted something close enough to a Cinderella-like fairy tale. Short of saying that the Year of the Rat will be turned into the Year of the Horse, it was predicted that the coming Chinese New Year would be a galloping one nevertheless.

Another predicted it would be good on almost all fronts while another said it would last for a good 12 years.

If this is so, Malaysia has little to worry about. But it would do the country—its leaders, its businessmen and the people—no good to place its trust on any fortune-telling for predictions.

This is especially so for those who can still recall their biology lessons about rats. To start with, they are creepy nocturnal creatures. They are also by nature dirty and could be the carrier of diseases, some deadly.

The dreaded bubonic plague quickly comes to mind, being one of the worst epidemics known in medical history. Large numbers of people perished across Europe.

Though the likelihood of such major incidents today appear extremely remote, rats still remain one of the most dreaded pests.

Of late, there were movies showing how adorable this group of animals can be (sometime even better-mannered than humans). But it is rather difficult to shake off that long-standing pesky image of them.

The exception perhaps are Mickey Mouse, and the adorable Tom in Tom and Jerry.

Although we look forward to the many wonderful predictions the Rat promises bring in the 2008 Chinese New Year, we are also mindful that it will take more than just a magic wand to make everything happen the way it is foretold.

The best bet is still to work very hard and look out for each other in ensuring a bright future for all Malaysians.

Let us also be reminded that five years ago, Feb 4, 2003 to be exact, a country disappeared from the world's map, just like another fairy tale.

What was once known as Yugoslavia, a large multi-cultural country of 23 million people, under the able leadership of Josip Broz Tito, is now relegated to the annals of history.

What is left today are memories of the past as well as the Internet country code — .yu.

The once proud Yugoslavia is now dismembered into six countries — Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and Macedonia, the former states that made up the country.



Movies like *Ratatouille*' (above) have tried to give rats humanlike characteristics but it is difficult to shake off that pesky image of them. The exceptions include loveable Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse

The tragic end of Yugoslavia also brought untold misery. Many thousands of innocent lives were lost, whole communities displaced, hundreds of thousands made homeless.

The various peoples of Yugoslavia had lived harmoniously together for decades in peaceful multicultural co-existence in this tragic Balkan region.

Yugoslavia had in 1948, dared to stand up to the iron fisted Joseph Stalin and stayed outside the Soviet bloc.

And Yugoslavia went on to co-found with other Third World countries, leaders an alternative bloc—the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

However, the demise of Tito in 1980, spelt the doom of Yugoslavia and its state ideology of compromise among the constituent countries. What came to fill the vacuum was rabid nationalism with unbridled competing demands.

Suddenly, they were at each other's throats. Fellow citizens killed one another, leading to one of Europe's worst wars since the time of Adolf Hitler.

A bunch of rats, in the likes of Slobodan Milosevic created hell on earth with massacres and ethnic cleansing programmes, all done in full view of the international community.

So, as we welcome and appraise the Year of the Rat and wish all will be well and prosperous in a magical sort of way, we need to perform our own magic, too.

We should not squander what we have successfully built over the last 50 years as a proud multicultural society which is even more enviable than the former Yugoslavia.

To say that Malaysia will not go the way of Yugoslavia will depend on us and whether we can see beyond one's tribe and clan.

Wishing all the Chinese reader Gong Xi Fa Cai

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