Time for Performance Appraisal

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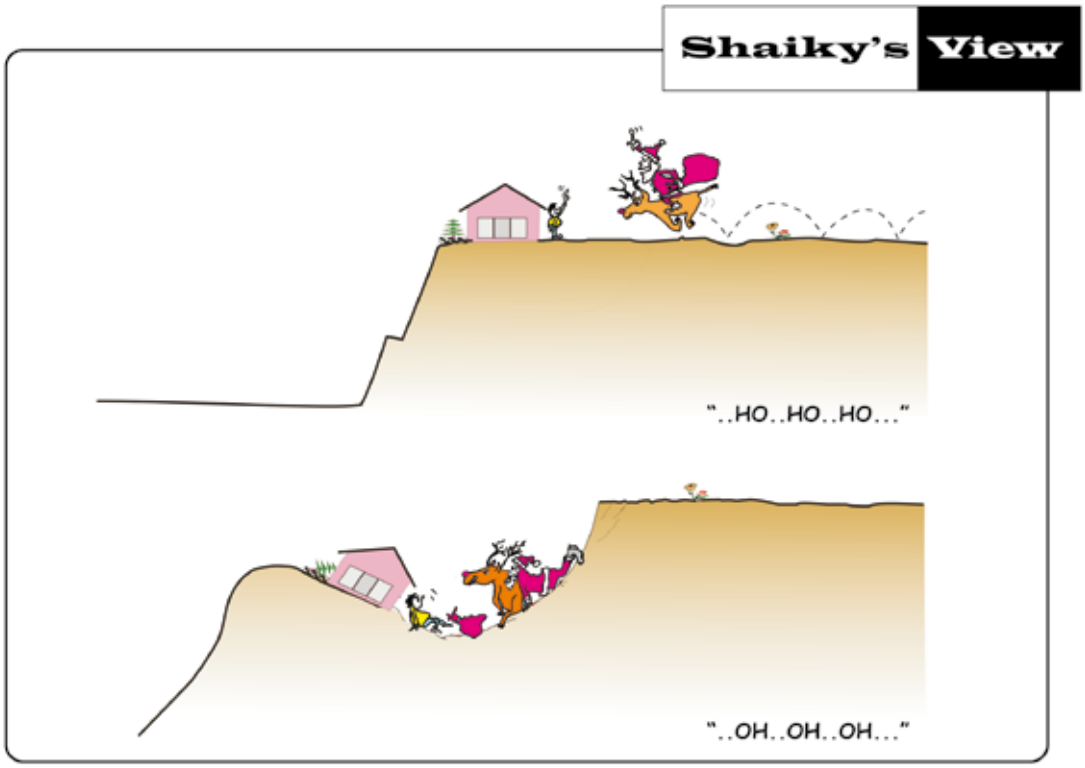
JURUTERA ends 2009 with the theme 'Dispute Resolution', which symbolically reflects the closure of all wounds and makes way for a more amicable year ahead. It is also time for me to reflect on the past six months as the Bulletin Editor.

Hopefully by now, you would have noticed the presence of a few new columns other than mine, viz. Hon. Sec.'s Report, Engineering News, METD Column, and Safe Tea Time. In this issue, you will find three more, plus a bonus: the President's Message. The long list of names of new student members has been published online instead. We believe all these will produce a more interesting read.

In addition, all 'ancient' reports have been cleared. However, the guidelines for reports had unintentionally reduced the number of fresh submissions drastically. Instead of having a backlog, we now have a 'black hole': empty spaces to fill! The GETD had provided bold leadership by quietly challenging the guidelines with two extended reports that are essentially feature-length, in-depth articles. I am testing the waters by publishing them in the November and January issues.

Noticeably scarce or even absent in many issues were feature articles. Not for the lack of effort, but the lead times from review to publication are in the order of months (some crossing a year), not weeks. Without any vetted articles in the pipeline when I assumed the Editorship, there was little I could do other than 'apply human relations skills'. Getting perfect strangers and volunteers with busy careers to meet deadlines is quite a task, though the Secretariat - with familiar faces - did moderate the situation.

The other end of the spectrum on 'future articles' is equally challenging. Planning two or three issues ahead gives a false sense of time available. Before we realised it, the contractual deadline to finalise the issue had come and gone. We continue to count our blessings for not entering into a dispute resolution phase with the Publisher or incurring the wrath of the Executive Committee of IEM ('Excomm'), though this matter was raised in the Excomm meeting.

How to do better in 2010? We will be spreading out the load of the Editor amongst the members of the Editorial Board: Engr. Abi Sofian will assist in ensuring timely clearance of articles submitted, I will focus on editing the current issue and Ir. Assoc. Prof. Dr Mohd. Saleh will coordinate future issues. In addition, Ir. Mohd. Khir coordinates Engineering News while Ir. Tu Yong Eng handles the Paper Series on Structural Eurocodes. Doing all these is just too much for a volunteer! The taskmasters amongst you might counter that all past Editors managed alone. Well, did they last? ■