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Defending private consumption vital

A. Kadir Jasin

WHAT differentiates Malaysia from most other East Asian nations facing economic problems in the wake of attacks on regional currency and stock markets is our ability to stay generally calm and to control the tendency to blame one another.

While the Thais took to the streets to bring down their Government, the South Koreans refused to elect their President's man and the Indonesians worry about leadership succession, our political stability remains largely unaffected.

This is due, in no small part, to our ability to focus our attention on the big picture and act accordingly. If anything, Malaysians treasure political stability more than ever now.

And this has not gone unnoticed. As the dust kicked up by the mid-year stampede in the regional currency and stock markets settled, more and more foreign investors and analysts are beginning to recognise political stability as the factor that differentiates Malaysia from its neighbours.

They see this as an important asset for the country in facing the economic problems.

This notwithstanding the relentless attack by a large section of the foreign media on the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, for speaking up against the lawlessness of currency trading and his call for it to be banned or regulated.

I am reminded of a statement by the Inspector-General of Police, Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Mohd Noor, in one of his Press briefings during the days when the Government was negotiating the surrender of the now defunct Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1988 and 1989.

He said the police, in particular the Special Branch, as the nation's security apparatus had always looked at the big picture when handling a crisis or a difficult situation.

At the same time it examined every element in the picture no matter how tiny or indistinct it was. In other words the police take nothing for granted.

The same approach is useful to all of us when making decisions. Take the current issue surrounding the decision to slow down the growth of bank loans and advances.