

05/02/1998

Use current situation to benefit from tourism

Dr K.N. Singh

I WAS shocked to read that the hotel room rates quoted for the Commonwealth Games was US\$200 (about RM800) instead of the US\$100 agreed upon three years ago (NST, Feb 2). This is akin to highway robbery.

The currency problem is always blamed but this is not fair. Yes, there have been some price increases but these are inevitable.

The Government cannot be expected to subsidise everything. We must also bear some of the responsibility for what is happening.

The Government must allow imprudent investments to collapse and be wiped out. The people's money must not be spent to shore up losses that resulted from imprudence. The banks must also suffer the consequences.

It would be better if those who intend to pay but cannot do so in full be allowed to re-schedule their repayments over a longer period with smaller amounts. Some form of waiver can be considered - for maybe a year - till we recover.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has said repeatedly that we must stand together. He has done all he can. We must now do our part.

This problem is not a burden but an opportunity. Yes, it is an opportunity to make money in the tourism sector. We are blessed that we have been given the opportunity to host the Games, and stand to benefit from the influx of tourists come September.

We must be proud of the ringgit. It has taken a battering but with this battering it has given us a unique opportunity. We are able to host the Games so much cheaper now and so we must not price our rooms in US dollars.

In Thailand, tourists are turned off as rates in some hotels must be paid with the dollar. They do not accept the baht. This is wrong and the tourist influx will slowly taper off.

Those who have to come will pay but they will take back memories of a scared population who have no faith in their own currency. If we don't have faith how can we expect the International Monetary Fund and the other countries to have faith in us.

We are lucky we have political stability and with faith and perseverance we can handle the financial instability. Can you imagine what would have happened if we did not have political stability? We have seen examples in other countries and dread to think what can happen.

This is the time to sacrifice and use this problem as an opportunity. Welcome the tourists and show them the warmth that Malaysians have in them. Quote rates in the ringgit to them. Make them feel welcome as they will help swell our coffers.

We need a problem such as this to forge a nation. Steel can only be forged in hot furnaces. It is all up to us. Only we can decide and make a difference.

Dr K.N. Singh

Johor Baru

(END)