

BN meeting 'can stop grumbling about economy'

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KUALA LUMPUR: Gerakan has called on the prime minister to convene a Barisan Nasional delegates' assembly to answer persistent grumbling about the nation's economic performance.

"Gerakan has always been critical on any issue. But this time, after evaluating the situation, we find that the economy is doing well, contrary to what has been perceived by many," party president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said.

"We want the prime minister to explain this and reassure the people."

Dr Lim pointed out that the economy grew by 6.5 per cent last year and currency reserves had reached a nine-year high.

"Inflation is at a low level of three per cent. Foreign direct investment, although it has dropped a little, is still at a competitive level."

He also said that foreign fund managers were making a comeback to the Kuala

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Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik, Gerakan party president

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Lumpur Stock Exchange.

"Rubber and oil palm have not seen such high prices before. Rural people are certainly benefiting from the improving economy but the spillover effects in the urban areas have not been felt yet."

"The economic environment is healthy and the despondent need to be told about it if they do not realise it or have a misconception about the economy," he said after

chairing the party's central committee meeting at its headquarters here yesterday.

The BN delegates assembly should comprise three members from each division's BN committee.

Dr Lim said the assembly could also deliver the coalition's general election message.

The general election will be held in two years and that is not a long time. We have to start preparing now."

Dr Lim also asked Batu Talam voters in the by-election not to be complacent with the fact that the BN's opponent was an insignificant candidate.

"It could be a ploy by the opposition to test the market."

"We cannot fall short in our preparations. If BN wins with a reduced majority, the opposition could take it as psychological impetus for the general election."

Referring to the RM15 billion undertaking to lay submarine cables between Sarawak's Bakun hydroelectric dam and Peninsular Malaysia, Dr Lim said the project was on and was expected

to take five years to complete.

Dr Lim, who is the Energy, Water and Communications Minister, said the project's lengthy duration was due to the 700km distance from the tip of Sarawak to Ulu Sedili, the nearest point in Johor.

"We also have to look into the right-of-way before we start laying the cables."

Dr Lim said volatile oil and coal prices had prompted the government to look into hydroelectric generators.

On the government's target of reducing the electricity power reserve of independent power producers by 20 per cent, Dr Lim said electricity consumption was expected to increase by six per cent per annum.

"By the time Bakun is completed and the cables laid, it will be timely to reduce the power reserve of the IPPs."