

PM: Let's make the most of these good times

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KUALA LUMPUR: The country's economy is moving ahead so vigorously that the obvious thing for Malaysians to do now would be to ride on the momentum.

However, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who emphasised this twice in the last two days, said this opportunity could only be realised if everyone worked together and focused on riding the tide.

The prime minister first spoke about this at a Press conference during Gerakan's Chinese New Year open house here on Sunday.

Yesterday, at another open house organised by the Penang Chinese Chamber in George Town, and alluding to the vibrant stock market, he said: "This is the perfect chance for us to grow further."

Abdullah said the Bursa Malaysia composite index, which was now at a high of more than 1,258 points, could surpass the 1,350-point level following positive indicators of the current economic growth in the country.

He said the recent figures announced by the government, including the trillion ringgit total trade last year, the increasing foreign and domestic investments, the rising stock market index and strengthening of the ringgit all clearly showed people had confidence in the economy.

He said the government was striving to keep inflation at a manageable level, and to create more job opportunities to keep unemployment low.

On the fuel price increase, he said it had been unavoidable due to rising oil prices all over the world.

"I know it caused much hardship to everyone but we must learn to manage.

"It was not an easy situation but we managed to stay afloat and we did not sink."

He said it was now necessary to add value to national development by increasing productivity and strengthening the people's competency.

With all kinds of speculations, particularly by economic experts, linking the buoyant business scenario with an early general election, the prime minister who was asked about this on Sunday, said: "So say the economic experts. I am a politician.

"When it is time for elections, then it is time for elections."

He was also asked to comment on speculations that the general election would be held before March next year as after that, former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim could contest.

To this, he said it had not even crossed his mind.

In a related development, Gerakan president Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik said the atmosphere at both Chinese New Year open house, hosted by MCA and Gerakan, showed that the people were happier.

"These are the signs of good times."

"I can see that within the last six months, things have gotten very much better."

Dr Lim said that in a big party like the Barisan Nasional, people on the ground sometimes spoke out of tandem with the party trend.

"But once the leaders sit together and thrash it out, we do what we think is the best



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (centre) presents an ang pow to the 'lion' at the Penang Chinese Chamber Lunar New Year open house in George Town yesterday. Looking on are Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon (partly hidden), Penang Chinese Town Hall chairman Datuk Seri Lim Gait Tong (right) and Penang Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Abdul Rahman Abbas (to the right of Lim).

for the people," he said, without referring to specifics.

"We may have had differences of opinion within Barisan component parties, but once we realise that it is affecting the consensus and the unity of the BN, then we quickly take action to stop it."

Dr Lim reiterated that the prime minister was a good housekeeper who was prudent in his spending.

He added that with the trickling-down effect, people will have more money in their pockets.

"Next thing you know, consumer spending will be rising again."