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Expanding Bumi middle-class (HL)

Sajahan Waheed

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Six Federal Government ministries will jointly draw up a programme to produce more middle-class Bumiputera entrepreneurs, Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamad said today.

The Ministers and their officials will attend a meeting to be chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim on March 17 to assess existing programmes. Also expected at this meeting are the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers.

"It will discuss methods and find ways how programmes can be drawn up or how they can incorporate the old ones," he told reporters after attending a Hari Raya and Chinese New Year open house organised by the Gombak Market Retailers Association at Km7 Jalan Gombak, near here.

Mustapa said the programmes must provide middle-class Bumiputera entrepreneurs more opportunities to participate in professional and skilled courses, expand franchise businesses and increase the number of investors with outlays of more than RM100,000.

The move follows a call by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Umno supreme council meeting on Tuesday for an increase in the number of such entrepreneurs.

Mustapa said the meeting would involve his ministry, the International Trade and Industry, Finance, Education, Youth and Sports and Rural Development ministries.

"One of my ministry's function is to create more middle-class Bumiputera entrepreneurs," he said, adding that the ministry held two meetings on Feb 24 and 25 to discuss entrepreneur programmes that had been implemented.

The first meeting was attended by various entrepreneurs while the second involved the Finance Ministry, Economic Planning Unit and the Prime Minister's Department.

Mustapa said among the sectors that would be given priority was the franchise business.

"We have 218 such businesses which is a relatively small number. The ministry has long carried out activities to increase franchise opportunities especially for middle-class Bumiputera entrepreneurs," he said.

Mustapa said more Bumiputeras were now involved in share market activities.

"There are an estimated 60,000 Bumiputeras with a maximum investment of RM100,000 each in Amanah Saham Bumiputera while there are about 2,000 people with an investment of RM100,000 each in Tabung Haji. This number could be further increased as it is one of the most efficient ways to produce more middle-class Bumiputera entrepreneurs."

He said another important aspect was for entrepreneurs to have initiative in carrying out their activities instead of relying on the Government alone.

"There is a tendency to rely on assistance from the Government. Of course, we will help in whatever way we can. However, entrepreneurs themselves should be motivated."

Earlier in his speech, Mustapa said the Government had always accorded equal importance to small scale entrepreneurs as it did to big businessmen.

On the Gombak market, Mustapa said it was located at a strategic location and could bring good profits. He said this could be achieved if shopowners

undertook promotional activities to bring in more customers.
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