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Integrated approach to enhance Malays' interest in retailing

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AN INTEGRATED action plan involving government agencies, financial institutions and owners of shopping complexes is needed to open up access to the retail business to small- and medium-scale Malay retailers, Malay Chamber of Commerce Malaysia (MCCM) deputy president Datuk Abdul Rahman Maidin said.

He said Malays who try to venture into the retail business face many obstacles, including high rentals at shopping complexes, accessibility to funding and lack of training.

"There is a need to look at the industry from a macro point of view, and an integrated approach is needed to enhance the Malays' interest in the retail business," Abdul Rahman told a news conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He was asked to comment on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's concern over the Malays' lack of interest in the retail business, which he raised during his presidential address at Umno's 54th General Assembly on Thursday.

Abdul Rahman, who is also Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd president, said Dr Mahathir's concerns are based on the number of Malays involved in retailing compared with their involvement in other fields.

"It is a call by the Prime Minister at an important gathering of Malays to remind everybody that the Malays' involvement in the retail business is important. The Prime Minister has pointed out deficiencies, so we have to see how we can overcome them ... we should react in the right manner," he said.

Abdul Rahman acknowledged that the percentage of Malays involved in the retail and distributive trade in towns is very small.

He said relevant parties such as district councils and development agencies like Mara and state economic development corporations, owners of shopping complexes and hypermarkets should be aware that successful Malay retailers are needed to strengthen the Malay economy.

Abdul Rahman said retailing and distributive networks are the core of the Malay economy because the retailer is the link between producers and consumers. "If there is no involvement of Malays in the retail business, it will be hard for goods produced by Malays to penetrate large supermarkets."

Shopping complexes, he said, should be sensitive to the needs of small- and medium-scale Malay retailers and should allocate space for them based on affordability.

"If we can build low-cost houses, why can't we build low-cost retail lots?" he asked, suggesting that shopping complexes allocate small retail lots side by side with the larger ones.

Abdul Rahman said banks should support small Malay retailers by improving their accessibility to funding, while at the same time help provide support services such as training, management and marketing networks.

He said Malaysia can emulate the large bazaars in West Asian countries where thousands of retailers are grouped together under one roof, or in South Korea where the authorities have made it possible for small wholesalers and retailers in the textile industry to operate in big cities.