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Participate in retail business, Bumis told

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Minimal participation of Bumiputeras in retail businesses within new townships could lead to future social unrest, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the new townships were not reflective of the actual ethnic make-up of the population, which, he added, could lead to ghetto communities.

He said this was why the Government was placing importance in Bumiputera participation in retail businesses especially at town centres.

"The Government is disappointed to note that despite the growth of new townships there are almost no Bumiputeras involved in businesses within them, especially in retail.

"If this continues, I am certain that we will once again face social problems which could lead to the (May 13) 1969 incident," he said at a dialogue with Bumiputera entrepreneurs at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Organised by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, the closed-door dialogue session attracted over 1,500 participants.

The participants fielded over 100 questions to the Prime Minister in the two-hour dialogue, held to convey the problems faced by the Bumiputera entrepreneurs and for the Government to discuss how best to assist them.

Dr Mahathir said a research suggested a co-operative effort between government approval agencies, banks and the entrepreneurs.

This is to encourage more interested Bumiputeras to enter suitable types of franchise businesses.

He said the Government had identified Bumiputera ex-servicemen as a target group which would engage in these businesses in the new townships.

Dr Mahathir added that the Government would conduct a study to determine their capital requirements and other assistance needed.

The Prime Minister also urged Bumiputeras to become vendors of higher-end components for the automotive industry.

He reminded the Bumiputeras that unless they addressed some of their negative attitudes towards businesses "the Government could introduce 1,000 new policies, but the problems will never be overcome".

He said although the banks were liat (difficult) in providing loans to Bumiputera entrepreneurs, they should also examine their own attitude towards debt repayment.

He said when a Bumiputera took for granted the need to repay debts, he was "smearing" the reputation of his own race.

"Discrimination towards Bumiputeras does exist and we can blame the banks, but if we are not responsible by not paying our debts, we are making things difficult for other people."

Dr Mahathir said this was a weakness which the Bumiputeras must admit. "I appeal that we be serious in financial management."

Dr Mahathir also said the number of Bumiputera middle classes was still not satisfactory.

He stressed the need to expand the Bumiputera middle class, which he described as "the pillar of strength" for any society.

He said the National Economic Action Council had already formulated strategies to encourage more Bumiputera participation in the retail sector.

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