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Manage finances, traders told

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ALOR STAR, Thurs. - Malay traders must discipline themselves and learn to manage their finances before they can develop their business, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said poor financial management was the stumbling block to the growth of most Malay-owned businesses and Malay traders should seriously take measures to improve this condition.

Dr Mahathir said they should avoid overspending and must set aside a portion of their earnings to repay business loans, rent and to add to their capital.

"We have to learn to manage our finances by disciplining ourselves," he said, adding that it was generally difficult for the Malays to save money on their own.

"Savings through the Employees' Provident Fund could be done because it is forced savings," he said when opening the 38th Koperasi Pekan Rabu Alor Star Berhad annual general meeting today.

Dr Mahathir who is a member of the co-operative said unlike salaried workers who were paid at the end of every month, traders including those at Pekan Rabu earned their money daily.

If they are not disciplined to save, they would not have enough money to pay for their loans, rentals and other payments, he added.

Dr Mahathir said there was no reason why Malay traders could not expand their businesses or venture into new trades.

"There are those (who made it), he sold goreng pisang (banana fritters), kayu api (firewood) and others and now he is Prime Minister," he said in jest referring to himself when he traded in Pekan Rabu during the Japanese occupation.

Dr Mahathir also reminded Malay traders not to be complacent with their achievements and to work harder to improve their business.

He also urged them to emulate Chinese businessmen who became successful in their ventures through hard work.

Citing the success story of Genting Group chairman and chief executive Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong, Dr Mahathir said Lim came to the then Malaya as a labourer at the age of 20 and worked hard to become a billionaire, who recently bought over Golden Hope Plantations from its British owner.

The Prime Minister said there were a lot of opportunities and funds provided by the Government which should help Malay traders improve their businesses.

"But I am sad that although the New Economic Policy was introduced more than 30 years ago and Malay traders had received a lot of financial support and training, many are still not able to manage their businesses well.

"That was why the Government introduced franchising which was simpler as all they have to do is to sell," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted to see more Malay traders set up shops in new townships which are now monopolised by Chinese traders.

"In Malaysia, we see there are not many Malay or Indian traders but only the Chinese ... This is not healthy for a multi-racial society.

"We want all to participate so that no one race feels envious of the others' success," he said, adding that such situation could reduce racial tension.

Dr Mahathir said if the Chinese continued to monopolise businesses in

new townships, it might give rise to racial tensions as had happened in 1969.

He said Malay traders should improve their business skills so that they could move from roadside stalls to shoplots in new townships.