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Overwhelming response to Prosper scheme since launch

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THE Prosper scheme, which aims to increase Bumiputera participation in the retail sector, has received an overwhelming response since its launch eight months ago with 8,710 applications nationwide.

Special adviser (Economics) to the Prime Minister Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said 50 per cent of the applicants have been identified as potential entrepreneurs.

He said Projek Usahawan Bumiputera dalam Bidang Peruncitan, or Prosper scheme, has successfully trained 14 entrepreneurs.

Nor Mohamed said at least 100 entrepreneurs should graduate from the scheme by the year's end. By the end of 2003 the number is estimated to reach about 1,000.

Prosper, launched on Aug 2 last year with an initial investment of RM15 million, is the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed. It comes under the jurisdiction of the Economic Planning Unit and is managed by Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Bhd.

The objective of the scheme is to see Bumiputera participation in the retail sector increase to 30 per cent over the next five to 10 years. Bumiputeras currently make up less than 10 per cent of the sector.

Nor Mohamed said the initial focus of Prosper would be on franchising which provides a ready-made business model that is easy to emulate. At present 22 franchisors have signed up with the scheme.

Under Prosper, PUNB will provide 30 per cent financing, banks 60 per cent and the entrepreneurs 10 per cent.

Nor Mohamed was speaking after the signing of a memorandum of understanding between PUNB and five accounting firms in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Arthur Andersen & Co, Deloitte Kassim Chan & Co, Ernst & Young, KPMG Desa Megat & Co and PricewaterhouseCoopers have been recruited to provide financial consultancy services to the Prosper initiative at no charge.

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