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Prosper to woo 250 Bumis by year-end

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THE Government-initiated entrepreneurship scheme for ex-servicemen, Projek Usahawan Bumiputera Dalam Bidang Peruncitan (Prosper), is expected to attract an additional 250 Bumiputera entrepreneurs by end of next year.

Prosper acting committee chairman Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said, since its launch in August 2 2001, a total of 81 applications have been approved, of which 40 businesses are already up and running. "The 40 businesses have a combined investment of some RM24 million and we are confident that 100 businesses will be operational by year-end," Nor Mohamed told reporters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Nor Mohamed is also the Special Adviser to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. He added the aim can be achieved based on positive response given currently to Prosper in terms of applications received averaging between 15 and 20 applications monthly.

Earlier, Nor Mohamed witnessed a signing ceremony between Perbadanan Usahawan Nasional Bhd (PUNB) and Accountants Online Sdn Bhd.

During the event, both PUNB and Accountants Online were represented by their chief executive officers Mohd Nasir Ahmad and Abdul Aziz Hidzir, respectively.

Also present were PUNB chairman Tan Sri Mohd Abu Bakar Mohd Nor, HeiTech Padu Bhd executive chairman Datuk Mohd Hilmey Mohd Taib, Mydin Mohamed and Sons Sdn Bhd managing director Datuk Ameer Ali Mydin and Accountants Online chairman Salbiah Hussain. Accounts Online is a subsidiary of HeiTech Padu.

"Size of businesses may vary but Prosper aims for its entrepreneurs to have an income of between RM3,000 per month and RM5,000 per month.

"This is in line with the Government's aim for Bumiputeras to acquire a wealth of at least 30 per cent from the country's economic cake which stands at 19 per cent under the New Economic Policy," he said. When asked why there is still lack of participants, Nor Mohamed said at the time of its inception, the committee was still unclear of which model to base the scheme on besides infrastructure and logistics problems.

"But I am happy to say that Prosper is now ready and will now recruit new participants full swing," he said.

Prosper is the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and has received 11,000 registrations of which, 2,769 participants attended workshops and sessions conducted by PUNB.

Since then, only 366 Bumiputeras sent applications with 81 applications approved. Forty of them are already doing businesses. Of the 81 participants, only seven are ex-servicemen. Interested participants must cough up a 10 per cent capital from the total value of business. PUNB will provide loans up to 30 per cent with the rest to be in the form of loans mainly by Credit Guarantee Corp.

Nor Mohamed said the 40 start-ups have retail and businesses ranging from optical, hardware, telecommunications and computers, restaurants and photo processing.

Others include pharmacy, books and stationery, boutiques, bakery, automotive and workshops, laundry, petrol kiosks and others.

He added 81 per cent to 90 per cent of the businesses are located in existing and new townships in urban areas compared to rural areas.

"Around 45 per cent of the businesses are from the non-franchisee category," he said.

Mohd Hilmey refused to elaborate on details of investment saying investment costs are absorbed within HeiTech Padu's other information technology (IT) subsidiaries.

Under the agreement, Accountants Online will provide PUNB accountants IT knowhow to monitor and maintain book-keeping and other accounting matters of Prosper entrepreneurs, enabling them to concentrate on their businesses.

PUNB comes under the direct purview of the Finance Ministry and Heitech Padu was the former IT unit of PUNB prior to a management buyout.

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