

**Najib praises Tekun for rejuvenating businesses**  
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PEOPLE FIRST: Micro-credit scheme a testament to govt's pledge to improve lives of rakyat

MICRO-CREDIT scheme, Tekun Nasional, an Umno brainchild, is responsible for assisting more than 250,000 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the country, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Also, the scheme was not only meant for Bumiputras, said Najib, as at least 5,000 traders from the Indian community had also benefited from the loans given to boost and rejuvenate their businesses.

In his address to some 7,000-odd SME traders at the Tekun Entrepreneurship Convention and Expo here yesterday, he also called for more micro-loans to be handed out to the Indian community in order to achieve holistic economic growth among the people.

"I can't imagine what we would do without Tekun. Sometimes I wonder, what would have happened to these 250,000 entrepreneurs if Tekun did not exist? Would you turn to loan sharks?"

"At the same time, there are many from the Indian community who want to improve their business. We should help them," said Najib to cheers from the crowd.

He said Tekun was first conceived in 1994 in Penang, during the Bumiputra Economic Convention held by the local Umno grassroots members. The funding body was later developed over the years and is currently under the purview of the Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Ministry.

Najib, who is also Umno president, said Tekun could be considered among the party's numerous achievements which reflected the government's commitment in serving the people.

He said the government would not make empty promises to the people, unlike certain quarters bent on seeking political mileage.

"Such a programme is a testament to our guarantee to improve the lives of the rakyat. The people must be prioritised in the spirit of the 1Malaysia concept. It is alright if some still do not want to vote for us. At least we get the pahala (heavenly reward) for helping them.

"It is Islamic to be just and it is also Islamic to be inclusive."

Recalling the time before the tabling of the 2013 budget last year, Najib said he had held a meeting with Tekun Nasional general manager and chief executive officer Datuk Abdul Rahim Hassan and asked him how much capital would be needed from the government to strengthen the fund.

Najib said Abdul Rahim had asked for RM300 million and it was immediately approved. However, Najib said that Tekun could have gotten more for its coffers -- to the laughter from the audience -- had Abdul Rahim asked for a larger sum.

"He did not ask for RM500 million. Datuk (Abdul) Rahim had asked for a smaller amount. Thus, that was the amount granted. However at the same time, it also shows that we are concerned about the development of Tekun."

Najib said Tekun was among the 82 funds created that, according to a survey by the World Bank, had ranked Malaysia as the country with the most credit access in a study of 183 countries.

Najib said the report in the World Bank's Doing Business Report 2011-2012 had also ranked Malaysia first for five years in a row.

"We have more than RM60 billion in funds and our repayment facility is the best and of world-class."

Najib said SME trading had contributed 32.5 per cent to the country's gross domestic product and was expected to record growth of about 41 per cent by 2020.

He urged traders to be honest, creative and productive in their business.

Najib related a story of a woman trader, who initially made only RM400 a month selling seaweed products when she first started the business.

"But her business acumen and creativity in marketing led her to venture online to sell her products. Now, she earns RM20,000 a month."

Among those present were Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Datuk Seri Noh Omar and Abdul Rahim.

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