

Dr M: Proof of Bumiputera status will be the criterion

Umno may accept Malacca Portuguese

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By K.P. Waran

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Malaysians of Portuguese descent can become Umno members if they are proven to be Bumiputeras, party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister, who chaired a three-hour supreme council meeting of the party today, said authorities on history would be asked to ascertain whether those who applied to join the party were Bumiputeras.

"If they are classified as Bumiputeras, then they would be accepted as members of Umno," he told a Press conference after a meeting of the party's supreme council.

The decision followed lobbying by the Portuguese community, many of whose ancestors arrived in Malacca during the period when Portugal ruled Malacca, to become members of Umno.

Members of the community had said that the people were culturally closer to the Malays and there were many similarities except that the Portuguese are Christians.

Malaccan Portuguese who refer to themselves as *Kristang* share with the Ma-

lays the *branyo* (*joget lambak*), *mata kantiga* (*pants*) and wearing of *sarong kebaya*.

The Portuguese community in the country had been given eligibility to buy Amanah Saham Nasional shares since August 1984.

The supreme council during its meeting last month had decided to ask the views of the Malacca Umno liaison committee about the applications by Portuguese Christians to join the party.

The Malacca Umno liaison committee which met last Wednesday decided to abide by the decision of the Umno supreme council on the issue.

State Umno liaison committee chief and Malacca Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Tamby Chik said many committee members felt that the Portuguese community should be accepted into the party.

He said he would brief the supreme council on the deliberations of the committee and the views expressed by the members of the committee.

Umno's membership had previously been open to people of Thai descent living in states along the Thai border and the Bumiputeras of Sabah.

Rulers agreed on Special Court

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The Malay Rulers had endorsed the amendments to the Constitution on Feb 11 which sought to remove their immunity in their personal capacity after agreeing with the Government on some modifications to the Bill.

They also agreed to the setting up of a Special Court to try anyone of them should they be involved in any offence.

Under the modification to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, any Ruler who is convicted for an offence and is jailed more than one day has to step down from the throne.

During the Press conference, Dr Mahathir also announced that the Umno supreme council had fixed the party's general assembly for the first week of November.

He said the Youth and Wanita meetings would be held on Wednesday (Nov 3) and the general assembly would begin on Thursday (Nov 4).

He said Umno divisions throughout the country would be notified of the deadline to hold their meetings.

This year is an election year for Umno and several of the supreme council positions are expected to be keenly contested.

Dr Mahathir said that during the meeting he explained to the supreme council members the modifications to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill 1993 which would be debated in the Dewan Rakyat on Monday and Tuesday and in the Dewan Negara on Wednesday.

"I explained the reasons and the meaning of the modifications and also informed the supreme council members on the agreement reached between the Rulers and the Government on the amendments," he said.

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