

05/03/1997

#### Umno wants Bumi middle-class expanded

Jailani Harun

THE Umno Supreme Council has directed all state governments to seek measures to create more middle-class Bumiputeras as to enable them to compete with other citizens in the country.

Party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said among the steps that can be taken are by giving Bumiputeras more opportunities to participate in business activities like franchising.

The party, he said, is deeply concerned about the lack of middle-class Bumiputeras although the country has prospered from various big projects.

"We have succeeded in creating a Bumiputera upper class who are very much involved in economic activities, but we are sad to note that our middle-class could not yet match the middle-class of the other races.

"For example, they (the Bumiputeras) are still not able to buy medium-cost houses of up to RM350,000. Only a few of them could afford to buy such houses although the Government is giving them a discount of 5 per cent," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also the Prime Minister, said the state governments should provide training for Bumiputeras in various fields, including commerce, to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills.

"We need to see more Bumiputeras taking part in our development programmes. As salaried workers, it is quite difficult for them to improve their standard of living," he said at a press conference after a two-hour Supreme Council meeting in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

As to whether the Federal Government will play the same role, he said the matter has already been forwarded to the Cabinet.

The meeting also discussed issues pertaining to social ills as well as disciplinary action against errant members.

On social ills, Dr Mahathir said the council has been directed to review its social responsibility in conjunction with the efforts of other parties to overcome the problem.

"We have categorised the responsibility, which includes the ineffectiveness of parents in giving proper guidance to their children, the need for teachers to give more attention to inculcating positive values among students, the Government's role and that of the media.

"Apart from that, we also want community leaders to play an active role. We want them to project a positive image," he said.

On party discipline, Dr Mahathir said it has been decided that any member found guilty of flouting the party's rules will have to follow the current procedures in making any appeal.

(END)