

Privileges not forever, says Dr M

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THE special privileges for bumiputras are not permanent and will be removed when the community reaches the set target, said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Describing the privileges as a safety net, he said it would be removed once there was no longer any necessity for it.

"The policy is not going to be permanent. Once there is no necessity for the safety

net, then we will remove the policy," he told a press conference at the end of the first day of the 55th Umno general assembly yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said he shared the concern of his deputy president, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, that Umno could face serious problems if it did not "shape up."

"We have 72 Malay repre-

sentatives from the Government and 32 from the opposition. If only another 21 seats are won by the opposition parties, we will be in trouble.

"Unless they (Umno members) close ranks and behave themselves, we may lose the next election," he said.

Asked by a foreign reporter on the necessity of the Internal Security Act,

Dr Mahathir said unfortunately there were people who liked to see the country in turmoil.

"They think they can bring down the Government through street demonstrations because they cannot win an election," he said.

He added it was the poor hawkers who would suffer as a result of the street demonstrations.

"We are looking after the

interest of the majority who would like a peaceful Malaysia," he said.

Commenting on his retirement, Dr Mahathir said he had to think of a right time to step down.

"But it is not so easy to step down. We have a responsibility," he said.

He said he had intended to step down in 1998 but circumstances had prevented him from doing so.

