

PM: I'll remain neutral in Youth polls

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KOTA KINABALU, Tues. — Umno president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that he will remain neutral in the coming Umno Youth elections where president Anwar Ibrahim is expected to be challenged by party Supreme Council member Syed Hamid Albar.

Dr Mahathir told reporters after a meeting with the State Barisan Nasional here that "I am leader of the Barisan and Umno. I do not take sides with any candidate."

On views that the challenge by Syed Hamid is in effect a proxy fight between his supporters and those of Umno deputy president Datuk Musa Hitam, Dr Mahathir said:

"I do not see this as a proxy fight. The truth is that earlier, Datuk Haji Suhaimi Kamaruddin challenged Anwar. That was not a proxy fight either."

Syed Hamid last week submitted his acceptance papers to challenge Encik Anwar in the Youth elections scheduled for July 31.

Three others — Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Datuk Seri Syed Nahar Shahabuddin and Datuk Suhaimi — were also nominated for the post. Datuk

Najib has rejected the nominations while Datuk Seri Syed Nahar and Datuk Suhaimi have until July 15 to reply.

Datuk Suhaimi, who was Umno Youth president from 1977 to 1982 when he was defeated by Encik Anwar, tried to wrest the post again in 1984 but lost again.

Yesterday, he said he would wait to see if others could contest the post before deciding.

Datuk Musa resigned as Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister in March because of differences with Dr Mahathir.

Many Umno Youth leaders view Syed Hamid's challenge as a proxy fight between Datuk Musa's supporters and that of Dr Mahathir's.

Syed Hamid is said to be aligned with Datuk Musa while Encik Anwar is known to be very close to Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir also said there has never been a "2M (Mahathir-Musa) government."

"This is the work of the Press. They like to create this kind of things to sensationalise. Now we have the "MG" (Mahathir-Ghafar) government," he said.