

Dr M: I can't stand in way of Umno members' choice

By Ahmad A. Talib and Farush Khan

TAPAH, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he had done as much as he possibly could to prevent contests for the two top posts in Umno, but would not stand in the way of the members' choice.

The Prime Minister said he could only persuade and advise, but could not stop or force them.

The Umno president said under the party's democratic system, it was difficult for him to stop the divisions from nominating candidates to contest any post, including the top two posts.

Dr Mahathir said this in response to reporters' questions at a Press conference held at the end of his two-day visit to Perak. The Press conference was held at Gunung Tempurung at the Tanjung Malim-Tapah highway, 15km from here.

The Prime Minister said he had given his advice to Umno members on the matter but remarked that it would be difficult to actually stop a contest.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on his closed-door meeting yesterday with Umno Perak, particularly on the latest situation in Umno.

He was asked whether he had repeated his advice that the two top posts — president and deputy president — not be challenged.

Responding, Dr Mahathir said: "In my opinion, there should not be contests for the top posts... that is my opinion."

Asked if he would step in to stop Umno divisions from proceeding to nominate candidates for the posts, Dr Mahathir said: "In our system, it is not that easy for me to stop that."

Asked to elaborate, particularly whether he would interfere if there were attempts by divisions to nominate anyone for the contests, Dr Mahathir said:

"I feel I have made my position very clear. I have advised...I think I've done as much as I possibly can."

Asked whether he would stop anyone from contesting in the light of the party's commitment to the democratic process, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, if I have to arrest anyone or sentence that someone to be shot (to stop the contest from materialising), then of course I can't."

"I can only persuade and advise...I can't stop...that is my opinion. I can't force them...I can only give strong advice. That is the Umno tradition...that there should

□ PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 2, COL 6

PBS 'out to gain from Umno polls'

□ FROM PAGE ONE

not be a contest if there is an incumbent."

The Prime Minister said "things" appeared a bit excited on the ground at the moment, but added that this was normal.

On the possibility of a snap election in Sabah, Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional would campaign as usual if there was going to be a poll.

Asked if the campaign would be diluted because of the Umno elections, Dr Mahathir said the Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) would try to seek mileage from the situation.

Asked to comment on the killing of Batu Talam State Assemblyman, Datuk Mazlan Idris, he said he was saddened by the cruel act. He added that he was awaiting a full report on the incident.