

# PM: I wasn't referring to the top leadership

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today his statement last week that candidates with no chance should withdraw from the Umno elections was not directed at the party's top leadership but divisional heads.

The Umno president and Prime Minister said he was talking about the contest for the divisional chairmen's posts. "There is no need for too many contests. If you have no chance, there is no need to contest," he said.

Speaking to reporters after opening the 14th Commonwealth Forestry Conference at Shangri-La Hotel here, Dr Mahathir said he was also talking about himself. He was asked to comment on current political developments in Umno.

He said: "I have no intention to remain if I have reached the senile stage."

Asked whether there

would be an attempt to avert a contest for the deputy president's post, Dr Mahathir said he alone could not avert one.

"It's up to the Umno leadership... and the Umno leadership is not just me alone," he said.

He added that it was up to the Umno supreme council whether to discuss this development at its meeting before the party's general assembly.

Asked to comment on the mood of some of the divisional meetings, Dr Mahathir said it was not too bad, although a few were tense.

On whether Malaysia would recognise Israel with the signing of the Israel-PLO peace pact, he said the Government would study the matter.

"Our stand towards Israel is influenced by their actions on the Arab and Islam-

ic countries as well as the Palestinians.

"But we will need to reconsider this stand especially since the Palestinians have recognised Israel," he said.

He said Malaysia would need some time to look at it.

Dr Mahathir also reminded newspapers not to carry items sacrilegious to the various religions in the country.

It would only create public tension and strife which would not benefit anyone, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Home Minister, was commenting on a cartoon strip carried by a local Chinese newspaper last Monday purportedly depicting Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

"This is unhealthy... we must not do things that touch on any religious beliefs in the country," he said.