

STUDENT ACTIVIST WHO ROSE TO HIGH OFFICE

AT 47, Education Minister Datuk Musa Hitam is three years older than Finance Minister Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, his opponent for the Umno deputy presidency tomorrow.

Datuk Musa was born in Johore on April 18, 1934 and had his early education at the English College, Johore Baru, before he entered the University of Malaya and graduated in 1957 with a Bachelor of Arts degree.

He was active in student politics and in 1957, accepted the job of associate secretary of the International Student Conference in Leiden, Holland.

He served there until 1959 when he returned and joined the civil service as an Assistant District Officer in Kluang from 1959 to 1964, when he resigned and joined Jardine-Waugh as an executive.

He then got to know the then Minister of Communications, Datuk (now Tun) Sardon Haji Jubir who offered him a job as political secretary.

Datuk Musa served with Tun Sardon for only one year and was next appointed acting secretary-general of Umno in 1965 when the then secretary-general Tan Sri Syed Jaffar Albar resigned over differences with then party president and Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman.

UMNO members must be calm and patient and remember that even if they are excited, they are campaigning only within Umno. What is important is the future. Umno is undergoing a selection process and not a crisis.

A few months later, Datuk Musa was appointed executive secretary of Umno and ran the party's administrative affairs until 1969.

In the meantime, the Segamat Utara Parliamentary seat in Johore fell vacant when the MP, Haji Abdullah Mohamed Salleh, died in August 1968 and Datuk Musa was chosen as the Alliance's candidate.

He was involved in a straight fight with the DAP's Lee Ah Meng and won by 3,754 votes to enter Parliament.

The following year, he was re-elected in the same constituency in the general election and was appointed Assistant Minister to

the Deputy Prime Minister.

Just when it seemed his career had taken off, the Tunku dismissed him from his post in August 1969. The Tunku said he had received an "unfavourable report" about him.

This was about the same time that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was expelled from the party.

Datuk Musa said then that he regretted the Tunku had not called him for an explanation.

He then left for Sussex University in Britain and did his Masters in International Relations.

He returned a year later apparently after he had

received feelers from Tun Abdul Razak who had taken over as Prime Minister when the Tunku stepped down.

Datuk Musa joined the University of Malaya as a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Economics and Administration.

Politically, he was also back in business. In January 1971, he was elected Umno Youth deputy president as well as a member of the party's Supreme Council.

Later the same year, he was appointed chairman of the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda), a post he retained until 1973 when he was appointed Deputy Trade and Industry Minister.

During his tenure at the Ministry, he led several trade missions to Japan, Europe and the United States.

In the 1974 general election, the newly-formed

Barisan Nasional scored a landslide win and Datuk Musa himself was returned unopposed in Labis.

When Tun Razak formed his Cabinet after the election, Datuk Musa was made a full Minister in charge of the Primary Industries portfolio.

'TOWKAY GETAH'

He likes to joke that this was the time he was nicknamed "Towkay Getah" (Rubber Towkay) but the job was not all plain sailing.

He had to face the tappers in Baling who demonstrated when the price fell sharply and his handling of this crisis won him kudos.

Datuk Musa retained his portfolio until January 1978 when he was appointed Education Minister by Prime Minister Datuk



Datuk Musa . . . three years older than Tengku Razaleigh

Hussein Onn in a Cabinet reshuffle following the death of Agriculture Minister Datuk Ali Haji Ahmad in the 1977 MAS crash in Johore.

In the general election in July that year, he was re-elected in the Labis constituency when he defeated PAS candidate Jamal Ahmad by a majority of 16,917 votes.

In the Umno General Assembly held later the same year, Datuk Musa

contested for one of the three vice-presidencies for the first time and was elected.

He came in third when he obtained 699 votes — behind Tengku Razaleigh (763 votes) and Encik Ghafar Baba (705 votes).

Since then, he was appointed head of the Malacca Umno Liaison Committee, a post he holds up to now, and was also appointed deputy chairman of the Johore Umno Liaison Committee.