

Cabinet post offer to Musa, Razaleigh

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today invited Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Musa Hitam to join his Cabinet as Ministers without portfolio.

In an unexpected and brief announcement at the end of his winding-up speech at the Umno general assembly this evening, the Prime Minister said:

"I would like to invite Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah and Datuk Musa Hitam to be members of my Cabinet as Ministers without portfolio.

"This is a sincere invitation ... it's a step towards mending the rift among the Malays and Umno members."

He said he was extending the invitation in his capacity as Prime Minister in the hope of achieving unity among the Malays.

At a Press conference following the announcement, Dr Mahathir said he had consulted Deputy Prime Minister Encik Ghafar Baba over the invitation.

He said that he did not consult other members of the Cabinet as appointments to it were his prerogative as Prime Minister.

"I admit that I did not consult members of the Cabinet or the (Umno) supreme council except Encik Ghafar Baba who agreed that Tengku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa should be invited into the Cabinet."

He said the letters of invitation would be issued soon.

Dr Mahathir said the offer was made because the earlier invitation for a meeting between him, Encik Ghafar, Tengku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa before the outcome of the Parit Raja by-election was thought to have been made because Umno was weak.

"The truth is, we are sincere. As we have seen (during the assembly), Umno is strong and the support for it firm.

"But, for the sake of unity, we are prepared to accept these two leaders into the Cabinet."

Dr Mahathir said there was no time limit for acceptance of the offer. Nor were there any conditions to the offer.

The question of their membership in Umno

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would be discussed but he pointed out that Umno was open to all Malays, including them.

He said there would not be any Cabinet reshuffle as Tengku Razaleigh and Datuk Musa would not be replacing anyone.

Asked what their duties would be, he said: "We'll have to work this out as there is a lot of work to be done."

Dr Mahathir said the invitation for the meeting with the two leaders was still open.

In reply to whether he would be able to work with the two since they had caused him much hurt, he said:

"I have worked with people who have hurt me a lot. I think I can continue working with people who hurt me a lot.

"As you know, when Datuk Musa resigned from the Government and the party I said I was willing to work with him, and when he returned to the party I worked with him."

Asked whether he would be able to trust them not to leak Government secrets in view of this allegation against them, he said: "Some people, after having made a mistake the first time, may not do it the next time."

To another question, he said although he had discussed the matter with Encik Ghafar before the assembly, he decided to make the offer in front of the delegates at the end of the assembly.

Asked whether the offer was being made in the right spirit in view of his vocal attacks against the two leaders at the assembly, he said: "It is difficult for me to just keep quiet when those on the floor were talking about it."

On how well he thought Tengku

Razaleigh and Datuk Musa would receive the offer in view of the accusations against them and vice versa, he said: "We have said nasty things about Pas, and they have said nasty things about us. We said nasty things about the Gerakan, too.

"There was a time when Pas joined the Government. And until now the Gerakan is still with us. One may say certain things at one time and later one may be a good friend. We said nasty things about the SUPP but today Datuk Amar Stephen Yong is a member of the Cabinet."

On whether he had plans to invite former Cabinet Ministers in the splinter group, like the MP for Jelebu, Datuk Rais Yatim, to join the Cabinet, he said:

"We cannot have too big a Cabinet. As it is, the inclusion of these two will make it big."

On whether it was true that he would be holding a snap general election as alleged by Datuk Musa, he replied:

"Why should I hold an election in April? I'm in a very strong position. I have 130 members in Parliament who are for me. Is there any reason for me to do that?"

Asked whether the small majority obtained by the Barisan Nasional in the recent Parit Raja by-election showed a split among the Malays there, he said: "The margin does not tell the full story. When I contested the presidency, I won by only 43 (votes). As you can see now, most of the delegates who were supportive of me came from Team B and some were leaders of the group.

"The results can be different from the actual feelings on the ground."