

Mustapha needn't vacate seat: Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Former Usno president Tun Datu Mustapha Datu Harun need not vacate his Usukan state seat because he has "not switched parties," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said Tun Mustapha, who has joined Umno with four other Usno MPs, had contested on the Barisan Nasional ticket in last year's general election.

"He is not really switching parties because the parent party is still the same.

"He contested as a Barisan candidate and not as Usno's. Therefore, his party is Barisan and not Umno or Usno. In my opinion there is no necessity for him to vacate his state seat.

"I don't know about the legal aspect (about the Sabah Constitutional provision compelling state assemblymen to give up their seats if they moved to another party)," he told reporters at Parliament House.

Asked whether he would challenge the provision, Dr Mahathir said a decision on this had not been made yet.

He said a by-election would be held if it had to be held.

"But in my opinion, this is a waste of money because he is not really switching parties," he added.

He said that if the constitution could be amended, it would be better and "clearer."

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said he would officially launch Umno's entry into Sabah on Feb 21.

He said it had not been decided who should head the Sabah Umno liaison committee as he wanted to meet members of the Sabah Umno pro tem committee first.

On a possible meeting with Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, Dr Mahathir said he had not decided yet.

However, he added, he had heard from "some people" that Datuk Pairin wanted to meet him.