

13 DEC 1999

Senators

MUSA MOHAMAD AND HAMID OTHMAN BECOME SENATORS TO TAKE UP MINISTERSHIP

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 13 (Bernama) -- Tan Sri Musa Mohamad, who was named the new Education Minister and Datuk Paduka Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, were today sworn in as members of the Senate.

They took their oath of office before Senate Deputy President Datuk Michael Chen Wing Sum here.

Their appointment as senators, each for a three-year term effective last Saturday, was to pave way for their appointment to the new Federal Cabinet announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last Friday.

Musa, 56, the former vice-chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia did not contest in last month's general election and was the first non-politician to be appointed Education Minister.

The senatorship would enable Abdul Hamid, who lost in the Nov 29 election in the Sik parliamentary constituency, to be reappointed to the post he held in the last Cabinet.

When approached by reporters later, Musa said he reckoned that his appointment was aimed at re-injecting professionalism in the ministry and going back to the rudiments of education.

Asked whether his ministership was meant to neutralise a ministry that was a seemingly politicised institution, he said: "I don't think my appointment is to neutralise anyone...I take it that the purpose is to re-inculcate professionalism in the ministry and re-emphasising the fundamentals of education."

He is scheduled to take his oath of office before the Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah tomorrow and start work on Wednesday.

Musa said his first task would be to analyse prevailing problems and go about resolving them speedily, looking at education in total and taking into account the community factor before contemplating reforms and drawing up strategies for the new millennium.

Asked whether, as Education Minister, he would try to change the mindset of students perceivedly anti-government, Musa said that obviously his job was not to silence this group but to make such students aware of their uppermost mission.

"If there is indeed this problem (of anti-government students) naturally we'll have to draw up specific strategies so that they put first the original purpose of them being undergraduates besides getting familiar with aspects of nationhood," he said.

Musa assured students that he would allow them freedom of expression but would not tolerate violence as a way of voicing their grouses.

When asked about his plans for political affiliation, Musa said he had not given it a thought yet.

"My present plan is to accomplish something meaningful during the three years of my term. We'll see what happens after that," he said.

Also speaking to reporters after being sworn in, Abdul Hamid admittedly said he would face an uphill task in convincing the nation about the relevance of the government cause on Islam and Muslims advancement in the light of attempts by PAS to negate such efforts through misinformation and distortions.

"We'll have to counter PAS' influence by way of opening the minds of

the younger people carried away by the opposition party's pre-occupation with promoting only Fardhu Ain (religious obligations) and disregarding issues of state and governance," he said.

According to him, PAS made no mention of offering alternative systems for the economy, education and development but "only raised issues about heaven and hell and intimidating people".

Abdul Hamid said Umno too would have to correct the perceptions on such issues, especially the sensitive ones.

Asked whether Umno would try to outdo PAS in fighting for the Islamic cause, Abdul Hamid said this task was a common responsibility.

"But Umno has already proven its capabilities in this regard," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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