

Call me former

DPM 1

WASHINGTON, WASH., April 20, 2002 — Outgoing Malaysian Human Rights Commission chairman Tan Sri Musa Hitam (*pic*) insists that he be referred to as “Former Deputy Prime Minister 1”.

Saying this in jest at a conference on Malaysia yesterday, he drew laughter when he said that there are “many of us now that we can form a club with me as chairman”.

Musa, who is leaving Suhakam on April 24 after two years at the helm, said he had no plans for the near future.

The mixed audience comprised Malaysian and American academicians, government officials and business executives, reports Bernama.

He said that there might be more former deputy prime ministers.

Other former deputies under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad are Tun Ghafar Baba and Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

When conference chairman Prof Datuk Dr Zakaria Ahmad commented on his youthful looks despite his age, and told Musa he hoped to look as youthful as him, Musa said that he wanted to do better.

“I hone to be like him when I get to be his age,;” he said, referring to Mahathir.

Musa is in his 60’s and Mahathir celebrated his 76th birthday on Dec 20.

Jokes aside, in his keynote address at the conference hosted by Ohio University at the Malaysian embassy, Musa said that while he was a vocal critic of Mahathir, whom he regards as his “best friend”, Malaysia under the present leadership was playing an important role in Southeast Asia and the world.

He said that under Mahathir, democratic governance was practised “with all its weaknesses and shortcomings”.

Malaysians too seemed more aware of their identity as Malaysians and were proud to be Malaysians, he said.

He gave a comprehensive speech on Malaysia’s programmes for national unity and the challenges ahead.