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Musa-Top

MUSA STILL IN TOP FORM

By: Salmy Hashim

WASHINGTON, April 3 (Bernama) -- Tan Sri Musa Hitam, chairman of the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam), can pull a large crowd and draws laughter with his charming wit at a conference on Malaysia here Tuesday.

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

The mixed audience of Malaysian and American academicians, government officials and business executives roared with laughter when Musa insisted that he be referred to as "Former Deputy Prime Minister 1".

"He said that there are "many of us now that we can form a club -- with me as chairman," he said in jest.

He said that there might be more. Other former DPM's under Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad are Tun Ghaffar 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 hope to be like HIM (meaning Dr Mahathir) when I get to be his age."

Musa is in his 60's while Dr Mahathir celebrated his 76th birthday last Dec 20.

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 Dr 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 Dr 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.

"Malaysia in the 21st Century" is a two-day conference to celebrate 20 years of the Tun Abdul Razak Distinguished Chair at Ohio University.

-- BERNAMA

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