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Musa reflects on Dr M's qualities

BANGI, Thurs. - At a conference in Doha, Qatar last month, Tan Sri Musa Hitam was asked to describe in one word how Malaysia had become a Muslim country.

After pausing for a few seconds, the former Deputy Prime Minister produced this terse reply: "Mahathir."

"When I told (Tun) Dr Mahathir (Mohamad) about this in China a few weeks ago, he was surprised," Musa said during the premier talk of Institut Pemikiran Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad under the auspices of Universiti Utara Malaysia today. "He had never heard me give such praises before."

The talk was launched by Higher Education Ministry's Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Dr Adham Baba at the Institut Latihan Keselamatan Sosial KWSP here.

To understand the man behind Malaysia's success, Musa called for a critical analysis of Dr Mahathir's personality, achievements and mistakes.

Musa had served as Deputy Prime Minister in Dr Mahathir's Cabinet from 1981 until he resigned in 1986 during a well-publicised falling out.

Musa also teamed up with former rival Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah to unseat Dr Mahathir as Umno president and Ghafar Baba as deputy president in the party's 1987 election but the bids failed.

While Tengku Razaleigh eventually formed the Umno splinter party Semangat 46, Musa withdrew from active politics and served the Government in various ambassadorial postings.

Many reading materials today, Musa said, either overly praised or criticised Dr Mahathir. "Such extremism in one's writing create doubt among academicians and intellectuals regarding the writers' credibility."

Despite his past entanglement, it was obvious Musa still had a great affinity for Dr Mahathir.

"He was a very curious man who always asked questions," he said. "Due to his thirst for knowledge, Dr Mahathir loves to read books and magazines. Once he likes an idea, he will implement it."

"In the first five years as the fourth Prime Minister, my goodness, we (the ministers) faced rapid fire ideas from Dr Mahathir. This had caused confusion among the officers as the ideas were so advanced. The officers were at a loss. Some of the ideas ended up not being implemented."

Musa also revealed a nickname for Dr Mahathir that not many people knew.

"He was also known as the bomoh (healer) for his ability to heal any problem and Osajefu, or Ghanaian for 'redeemer' for his knack to regain what was lost."

Musa described Dr Mahathir as a leader who won't easily budge from a decision he had studied carefully.

"Admitting a mistake is a sign of weakness for Dr Mahathir," he said. "He possessed supreme confidence and conviction in what he did."

To nudge Malays towards progress and development, Musa said, Dr Mahathir had to use provocation.

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