

Ku Li 'came close to rejoining my cabinet'
Malaysiakini.com
March 30, 2007
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Former premier Dr Mahathir Mohamad today claimed that his former political rival Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah came close to becoming a cabinet minister after several years of political wilderness.

Mahathir revealed this during an impromptu speech at an event featuring Razaleigh, who was delivering the annual presidential address of the Federal Body for Malay Education and Development at University Malaya today.

"I want to clarify that Razaleigh almost returned as a minister in my cabinet. But, because of his interview with Far Eastern Economic Review (then), I had to 'review' [my decision]," he quipped, drawing laughter from the audience.

Mahathir said his previous cabinet featured a lot of former opponents who had once tried to topple him.

"Among them was one that was anointed 'crown prince' and later became 'King'", he said in an obvious reference to his successor Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"These are people who challenged me. I don't keep it at heart. If someone struggles for (our) race, I have no right to stop them from playing their role," he added.

Abdullah was once aligned to Razaleigh's faction during Umno's tumultuous period in the late 80s. Razaleigh challenged Mahathir for the Umno's presidency in 1987.

Following his narrow defeat and the ensuing court battle which saw Umno deregistered, Razaleigh (left) went on to form Semangat 46 in an attempt to revive Umno.

When Semangat 46 was disbanded in 1996, Razaleigh and most of his followers joined Umno Baru which was formed by Mahathir.

During his brief speech this evening, Mahathir clarified that he was invited to attend the function to 'just listen' and not speak.

However, he was later invited to share his views on Tengku Razaleigh speech.

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