

MUSA: KU LI COULD HAVE BEEN PM

Former DPM recounts rivalry for Umno No. 2 post at the launch of Razaleigh's memoirs

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FORMER deputy prime minister Tun Musa Hitam has heaped praise on his one-time rival, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, more fondly known as Ku Li.

"Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah would have been our prime minister today, had history been different," he said.

Speaking at the launch of Tengku Razaleigh's memoirs, *Ku Li: Memoir 205*, the 90-year-old called Ku Li a "wizard" with a unique talent for dispelling confusion and finding solutions to the nation's economic and developmental challenges.

"Back then, young people's views were appreciated. Ku Li was one of those young men!"

When it came to his turbulent relationship with Tengku Razaleigh, Musa explained that it was an interesting journey.

"Razaleigh was already a well-



Tun Musa Hitam says he shared many memorable moments with Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah back in the day when they were rising political stars.

known figure and someone I knew when I first entered politics.

"The name Ku Li was already famous, and he had the potential to be a valuable asset to the government."

There were many memorable events during their shared political journey, said Musa.

"There was a time Ku Li and I were trying to take over the leadership of Umno as Tun Hussein Onn was about to step down.

"Ku Li visited my office one day and asked me directly, 'Musa, I want to ask you, are you planning

to challenge Mahathir (Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad)?".

"I couldn't believe my ears! I responded, 'I'm going to try to retain my position as deputy president of Umno. If there's an opening, I'll enter the race'," he said.

The 1987 showdown between Dr Mahathir and Tun Ghafar Baba's Team A and Tengku Razaleigh and Musa's Team B marked the first major rift in Umno, with contests raging for every position — from president to supreme council members.

"It was the talk of the town back

then! We actively campaigned during that intense period.

"We knew we would win. We were made to feel and we did feel confident that we would win. Team B!

"But I was stupid! I told Razaleigh, 'Assuming we win tomorrow, I would like to tell you I do not wish to be deputy prime minister. Leave me out!'

"He took note but he couldn't do anything. As it happened, we did not win. The rest, as they say, is history."

The formation of factions and alliances within Umno were highly fluid. Back in 1981, with Dr Mahathir's tacit support, Musa, the then education minister, defeated Tengku Razaleigh, the finance minister at the time, to become Umno deputy president.

Despite retaining his cabinet post, Tengku Razaleigh launched another unsuccessful bid against Musa in 1984.

Frustrated, Musa urged Dr Mahathir to remove Tengku Razaleigh from the cabinet, but the then prime minister merely re-assigned Ku Li to the lesser portfolio of trade and industry.

"I was absolutely fuming," Musa admitted with a chuckle.

"It turns out Ku Li, whom I had defeated, went back to the Mahathir camp! It's important for me to tell and, more importantly, I'm telling you... how stupid I was in politics! From Dr Mahathir's

viewpoint, it was the right thing to do."

Musa described Dr Mahathir's political approach as being as effective — or flawed — as that of the British.

"Dr Mahathir, if you're listening... as a politician, you are brilliant. But as a politician, I was stupid!" he quipped, drawing laughter.

"You, Razaleigh, and I were stupid politicians!"

Musa emphasised that his recollections involving Dr Mahathir were not meant to tarnish the former prime minister's reputation.

"It's up to individuals to interpret my relationship with Dr Mahathir after hearing these stories.

"There is no issue between Dr Mahathir and me. But I know when I mention his name, people get excited and intrigued.

"Every time I meet Dr Mahathir, there are no problems. We shake hands and joke around. Our sense of humour is fantastic.

"Whatever people think is their business, not mine. My concerns are between me and Allah SWT," Musa told reporters after the book launch.

Page 1 pic: Tun Musa Hitam (centre) and Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah (right) at the launch of 'Ku Li: Memoir 205', in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With them is the author Datin Zinitulniza Abdul Kadir.