

What options for Mahathir?

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Following tradition, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will take his oath of office as Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister on the morning of July 16 — before the Yang di-Pertuan Agong in the Throne Room of Istana Negara.

He will then sign the Instrument of Office, witnessed by Lord President Tun Mohamed Suffian.

This ceremony will be held after Datuk Hussein Onn offers his resignation in an audience with

By ZAINAH ANWAR

the King the same morning.

The day before, Datuk Hussein will chair his last cabinet and Barisan Nasional Supreme Council meeting.

Policy speech

Speculation is now rife on whether the Prime Minister designate will be sworn in alone or together with his new cabinet line-up.

There is nothing in the Malaysian constitution that places a time limit

within which a new Prime Minister must name his cabinet. Datuk Hussein took seven weeks. But the late Tun Abdul Razak was sworn in together with his new cabinet when he took office on September 23, 1970.

Later that afternoon, Tun Razak announced the portfolios of his Ministers and deputy ministers at a press conference at Parliament House. He had, the day before, announced his deputy to be Tun Dr Ismail.

An hour after taking office, Tun Abdul Razak was already at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka making his first major policy speech as Prime Minister in an address to Umno Members of Parliament and State Assemblymen.

Tunku Abdul Rahman also made his farewell address to the Umno politicians after saying his thank you to Cabinet colleagues at a special cabinet meeting the day before.

For Datuk Hussein, it was a rather emotional swearing-in. As he was taking his oath of office on Jan 15, 1976, Tun Razak's remains was in flight from London where he had died of leukemia.

In the next hour, Da-

tuk Hussein was chairing his first Cabinet meeting to discuss funeral arrangements for the late Tun. Two days later, he chaired separate meetings of the Umno and National Front Supreme councils at his residence.

Although there was no Cabinet change, all the Ministers and their deputies took their oath of loyalty and secrecy before the King on Jan. 23.

This swearing-in was a "mere formality" for the Ministers to renew their oath to the new

leadership under Datuk Hussein who had said he was "in no hurry" to form a new Cabinet.

It was not until March 5, almost seven weeks after taking office, that Datuk Hussein announced his own Cabinet line-up.

Meanwhile, it is also Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir's prerogative to take his time to select his Ministers. If he chooses to start the office of Prime Minister with his own cabinet, then he has two weeks to make his choice.

For what will actually happen, the Malaysian people will have to wait. We will not have to wait long.