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Handover-History

HANDOVER ON OCT 31 THE LONGEST-PLANNED

By: Santha Oorjitham

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's handover of the premiership to Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi on Friday will be the most orderly in Malaysia's history.

"This is definitely the longest-planned handover," said historian Datuk Dr Khoo Kay Kim, "although in the other cases, there was never really any doubt that the deputy prime minister would take over."

While there was no speculation about who would be Malaysia's next prime minister, he said, many were now guessing about who would be his deputy.

The Professor Emeritus with Universiti Malaya's History Department pointed out that the country's first two leadership changes took place in times of crisis.

Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, announced that he was stepping down on Sept 21 1970 -- while the country was under the management of the National Operations Council (NOC) following the riots of May 13 1969.

And the country's second leader, Tun Abdul Razak Datuk Hussein, died in office on Jan 14 1976.

Each succession was conducted differently.

On Sept 22 1970, Tun Razak arrived first at the Istana Negara, at 9.28 am and was shown into the guest room.

The Tunku arrived two minutes later and was admitted to the Throne Room, where he submitted his resignation to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, the Sultan of Kedah, his nephew.

It was Tuanku Abdul Halim's first official function, after being sworn in as Malaysia's fifth King the previous day.

Tun Razak was then escorted to the Throne Room, where the King handed him his letter of appointment, witnessed by the Tunku.

No Cabinet ministers or dignitaries were present.

About an hour later, the Tunku and Tun Razak both met over 400 Umno leaders, MPs and state assemblymen at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

The Tunku called on party members to be loyal and give their full support to the new Prime Minister.

Tun Razak named his deputy, Tun Dr Ismail Datuk Abdul Rahman, and presented the new government's political testament.

He said the NOC would continue to function in its present form until Parliament met in February the following year.

'Kaum Ibu' (now Wanita Umno) leader Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim then blessed the Tunku, Tun Razak and Tun Dr Ismail with saffron rice and scented water.

Datuk Hussein Onn was sworn in as the country's third Prime Minister by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Yahya Petra, at 9.30 am on Jan 15 1976 -- the day after Tun Razak died.

Dressed in a white baju and black sampin, Hussein wiped away tears during the ceremony which was witnessed by Cabinet ministers, the Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, Istana officials and his own physician.

He chaired his first Cabinet meeting at the Prime Minister's Department an hour later, to plan the funeral for the late Tun Razak.

Five years later, he handed over the premiership to his deputy, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

On July 15 1981, Datuk Hussein chaired his last Cabinet meeting and cleared up his office.

The following morning, he witnessed Dr Mahathir taking his oath of

office in front of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Sultan Ahmad Shah.

Dr Mahathir was seated on the left of the throne while Datuk Hussein was seated on the right.

All the Cabinet ministers (except Foreign Minister Tengku Ahmad Rithauddeen who was in New York) were present, as well as the acting Lord President (a post now renamed as Chief Justice), the President of the Dewan Negara, the Speaker of the Dewan Rakyat, the Chief of Defence Forces, the Inspector-General of Police and other senior Government officials.

In a separate ceremony in another hall of the Istana, Datuk Hussein was awarded the Darjah Seri Maharaja Mangku Negara (SMN), carrying the title "Tun".

Tun Hussein and Dr Mahathir then adjourned to the Prime Minister's Department for the handover.

After Dr Mahathir announced last year that he would be retiring, said Prof Khoo, for some time the question of whether he would be succeeded by his deputy "appeared to be open."

"But with the Prime Minister repeating that it would be Pak Lah, the speculation turned to who would be Deputy Prime Minister," said the historian, adding that it was the new Prime Minister's prerogative to choose.

-- BERNAMA

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