

26 MAY 1999

Mohamed-Khalil

TOK MAT HANDS OVER DUTY TO KHALIL

KUALA LUMPUR, May 26 (Bernama) -- After more than 16 years steering the Information Ministry, Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat today officially handed over his duties to his successor Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob and bade farewell in a simple but emotional ceremony.

Mohamed, who is synonymous with the ministry and RTM, left behind a host of successful campaigns such as "Semarak", "Setia" and "Mesra", not to mention giving the ministry the acronym "Kempen".

"He (Khalil) is happy to be here and I am happy to go," a happy-looking Mohamed told reporters shortly after the handing-over ceremony at the minister's office.

Many reporters who have been covering him over the years were under the impression that Tok Mat, as he is affectionately known, was going to hold his last post-Cabinet news conference at the Rumah Eksekutif, but they only realised later that it was Khalil who attended the Cabinet meeting today.

Mohamad's aide said this was the first time "in many, many years" that his boss woke up at 10am on a Wednesday. Cabinet meetings start at 9am every Wednesday.

The ceremony at Angkasapuri was attended by ministry's top brass as well as heads of department and agency under it.

Among them were Deputy Information Minister Datuk Suleiman Mohamed and the ministry's outgoing Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal who has been promoted to Housing and Local Government Deputy Minister.

Also present were the ministry's Secretary-General Datuk Zawawi Mahmuddin, Information Department Director-General Abas Salleh and Bernama acting General Manager and Editor-in-Chief Syed Jamil Jaafar.

They joined long queues to bid farewell to Mohamed and accompanied him to his car. Earlier, they had lunch with the former minister.

Describing Khalil as "the man of the hour", Mohamed told reporters that he was confident that the former Pahang Menteri Besar would do a great job as the new Information Minister.

"I'll assist him by giving the views of a former information minister," said Mohamed.

Khalil was sworn in as a Senator on Monday to enable him to join the federal cabinet.

Mohamed also took a swipe at those who questioned his decision to resign.

"I don't want to be sad and I don't want people to make me sad. It's my own decision," he said.

He said he was grateful for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's confidence in him to continue being Barisan Nasional (BN) secretary-general, which Mohamed described as "a big job".

His first priority as secretary-general of the governing coalition would be to strengthen the BN machinery to face the impending general election due anytime before June next year, Mohamed said.

Asked if he has any regrets leaving the ministry, Mohamed said: "I have some sentiments. I came back and now I am leaving as a satisfied man."

Mohamed, 61, became Information Minister in 1978 but was dropped from the Cabinet four years later.

He was reappointed to the post on May 20, 1987 and held it ever since until he tendered his resignation last May 4.

On talk that he resigned from the cabinet to vie for a state seat in

Johor, Mohamed, who is the Member of Parliament for Pulai, said: "No, What kind of speculation is that. I don't want to answer that question."

At the end of the unscheduled news conference, a reporter approached Mohamed, expressing gratitude for the cooperation he accorded journalists assigned to the information ministry beat.

Visibly touched by the gesture, Mohamed replied: "Thank you. I have always been nice to you all and I am very sure that I will see you again."

Mohamed said he would take a short rest before serving full-time as BN secretary-general at the BN headquarters on the eighth floor of the Putra World Trade Centre here.

"You can see me there," Mohamed told reporters before Khalil accompanied him to the elevator to make his exit from the eighth floor of the Angkasapuri building where the Information Minister's office is.

Mohamed started his political career at the age of 26 when he was appointed Political Secretary to then Transport Minister Tun Sardon Jubir.

In the 1969 general election, he won the Johor Baharu Barat parliamentary seat and was appointed Health Ministry Parliamentary Secretary a year later and promoted to Deputy Finance Minister in 1973.

-- BERNAMA

ES RYN