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Mohamed-Profile

TOK MAT SYNONYMOUS WITH INFORMATION MINISTRY

By: Ahmad Fuad Yahya

KUALA LUMPUR, May 20 (Bernama) -- After serving four terms or about 16 years as Information Minister, Datuk Seri Mohamed Rahmat's name has become synonymous with the ministry.

Information is also the only portfolio he has held as a Minister although he had been a Deputy Minister and Parliamentary Secretary in other ministries.

Although he has been given various nicknames, the 61-year-old leader is more affectionately known as "Tok Mat" among ministry staff and journalists.

He is also referred to as "Mat Besar", a nickname given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, "Mat Bulat", "Mat Setia" and "Mat Semarak".

Some of the nicknames were linked to programmes he introduced as government campaigns to unite the people, efforts which are consistent with the ministry's acronym "Kempen" (Malay word for campaign).

Among the programmes that have had an impact on the people are the Semarak (Leaders Meet The People), Setia (Loyalty), Mesra (Friendly), Raise the Malaysian Flag and Love the Country campaigns.

He is also one minister known for his singing talent as he has sung many times at public functions.

Journalists also find Mohamed amiable, a quality not surprising given that he grew up in a big-family environment.

Born on Jan 4, 1938 in Johor Baharu, Mohamed is the seventh among 17 siblings.

In an interview with a newspaper in 1971, Mohamed said he came from a family of 21 brothers and sisters but four had died.

Before his active involvement in politics, Mohamed was a teacher at King Edward VII School in Taiping in 1963 and a scriptwriter with Filem Negara from 1964 to 1965.

The year 1965 marked the start of his political career when he was appointed political secretary to then Transport Minister the late Tun Sardon Jubir.

Mohamed had joined the Tampoi Umno Branch in the Pulai Division two years before that.

Since winning the Johor Baharu Barat parliamentary seat in the 1969 general election, he had been appointed to several positions in the government beginning with Health Ministry Parliamentary Secretary on Nov 1, 1970, a post he held for only two weeks.

From there he moved on to Education Ministry Parliamentary Secretary until he was promoted to Deputy Finance Minister on Aug 13, 1973.

After that he was made Deputy Minister of Coordination of Public Corporations on Sept 5, 1974 and was Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry from March 5, 1975 until Dec 31, 1977.

On Jan 1, 1978, Mohamed was promoted to Information Minister. However, he served in the ministry for only one term as he was dropped from the Cabinet on April 28, 1982 despite retaining the Pulai parliamentary seat in the 1982 general election.

Mohamed has contested and won the Pulai seat since the 1974 election. However, Mohamed was appointed Minister without Portfolio on Aug 27, 1982 and made Ambassador to Indonesia.

However, he relinquished his post as Ambassador on Nov 30, 1984 and

resigned as Minister without Portfolio on Nov 7 the following year.

On May 20, 1987, he returned to the Information Ministry and since then his political career had been shining again, as described by a Utusan Melayu journalist in an exclusive interview, "Mohamed gets second political life".

Mohamed, who has been through ups and downs in his career, was given the trust to hold several key party posts because of his patience and commitment towards the party struggle.

They included Umno Youth Exco member (1972-1974), Pulai Umno Division head (since 1973), Umno Youth vice-chief (1974-1976), Umno Supreme Council member (1975, 1978).

He was Umno secretary-general from April 13, 1988 until Nov 28, 1996 and has been Barisan Nasional secretary-general since March 22, 1994.

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AFY NMO YBY