

Employees of the public works department in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao on Thursday bade goodbye to an engineer Malacañang lend to help reform the graft-ridden regional agency.

Hadji Emil Sadain, who helped ARMM Gov. Mujiv Hataman manage the Department of Public Works and Highways in the region for three years, will return on Monday to the DPWH national office where he is assistant secretary for foreign-funded projects in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Sadain and Hataman supervised in tandem the DPWH-ARMM's operation and overhauled its regional office in the autonomous region, an effort that led to the agency's having been named last year as the regional government's best performer, via a selection process initiated by auditors and various civil society organizations.

Sadain turned over the stewardship of the DPWH-ARMM to a province-mate, Engineer Don Loong, his deputy regional secretary since 2012.

The ethnic Tausugs Sadain and Loong are both from Sulu, a component province of ARMM.

Loong, also civil engineer, said he will do his best to emulate the examples of Sadain, who was voted most outstanding ARMM regional secretary in a search that capped off last year's month-long founding anniversary of the autonomous region.

The DPWH-ARMM was known during the time of previous administrations as the second most corrupt agency in the regional government, next to the region's education department.

Among the accomplishments of Hataman and Sadain in reforming the rank-and-file personnel and administrative functionalities of the department was their having generated, from 2012 to 2014, some P600 million worth of savings from project funds from the Department of Budget.

Hataman, a Yakan from Basilan, first assumed as appointed ARMM governor in December 2011 and, subsequently, became the region's eighth elected chief executive during the May 13, 2013 regional elections.

It was also during Hataman and Sadain's joint management of the DPWH-ARMM when the regional department — for the first time ever since the inception of the autonomous region in 1990 — opened to the public and to media coverage all bidding processes for projects and its procurement of equipment and enlistment of costly, labor-intensive contractual services.

The regional department had also built in the past two years new district engineering offices in the ARMM provinces, refurbished old ones, procured additional road-building equipment and surveying instruments out of its savings.

From these savings came the money being spent now by the regional government for high-value on-going flagship projects in Mamasapano town in Maguindanao, including a P16 million worth concrete footbridge connecting farming enclaves at both banks of a river in Barangay Tukanalipao in the municipality.

Loong promised to expedite the completion of all on-going projects started by Sadain.

Loong said he is grateful to Sadain for having assured Hataman to continue helping oversee the DPWH-ARMM even if he has returned to the central office of the department.

Sadain became regional secretary of DPWH-ARMM for three years on a special detail agreement between President Benigno Aquino III and Hataman.

Hataman said he is confident Loong could manage efficiently the DPWH-ARMM.

Loong, scion of a big political clan in Sulu, became civil engineer in 2001. He, too, had served DPWH on various capacities and has had active involvement in managing foreign-assisted government infrastructure initiatives.

Loong also had extensive study exposures in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in the United States.