

Farewell Dr Radin Umar

The country has lost an expert in higher education and road safety.

HE has been described as a highly respected academic who was truly committed to both higher education and road safety.

Datuk Dr Radin Umar Radin Sohadi who passed away early last Sunday, was instrumental in developing and implementing several higher education strategies.

He also set up the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (Miros).

Dr Radin Umar, 53, who previously served as director-general of both the Higher Education Department (JPT) and Miros, stepped down as Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vice-chancellor in December 2012.

"I am on cancer leave and will be at home. I hope to spend my time writing and contributing in any way I can. I also want to train the young officers in Miros," he said at the time.

When he first moved from the ministry to UPM in 2011, he was asked if he had set the bar too high for he had been responsible for implementing a number of systems including the Malaysia Research Assessment, the Malaysia Quality Evaluation System and several key performance indicators which ironically he now had to face as vice-chancellor.

"My experience at the ministry has given me the privilege of understanding exactly what is expected in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and my present job requires me to translate that into action at UPM," he said at the time.

Dr Radin Umar was a vice-chancellor and director-general who had vision, ideas, energy and dynamism, says Universiti Malaya vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Ghauth Jasmon.

"His voice was heard in all academic circles. UPM made admirable progress on many fronts under his capable leadership," he adds.

A dedicated man

Albukhary International University vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dzulkifli Abdul Razak who describes Dr Radin Umar as a friend, colleague and a professional, says he was dedicated and committed to higher education.

"It was under his leadership as JPT director-general that several strategies including the National Higher Education Strategic Plan and apex university status was completed and implemented," he explains.

He adds that Dr Radin Umar had a thorough understanding of higher education and became a source of knowledge to his colleagues at the ministry and higher education institutions.

Concurring, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) board of governors' chairman Tan Sri Dr Zulkefli A Hassan says Dr Radin Umar was instrumental in introducing many innovative steps that transformed the higher education sector.

"These included the instruments to assess a university for research university and apex university status, assessing institutions on whether they qualify as centres of excellence as well as assessing students' soft skills.

"The development of each instrument was tedious and painstaking, incorporating many international best practices," shares Dr Zulkefli who was the higher education ministry's secretary-general when Dr Radin Umar was heading JPT.

Prof Datuk Dr Rujhan Mustafa who served as JPT director-general



Thank you: Dr Radin Umar receiving mementos from university staff on his last day with the institution at Serdang in December last year.



Astute analyst: Prof Sharifah Hapsah says he knew how to bring out the best in everyone.



Great man: Mohamed Khaled says Dr Radin Umar was the driving force at the ministry.



Safety first: Prof Ahmad Farhan says Dr Radin Umar was known globally for his efforts in road safety.

after Dr Radin Umar moved to UPM, says he was an individual with calibre and integrity.

"He was very sharp and always went 'straight to the point' perhaps due to his training as an engineer," says Prof Rujhan who is now Performance and Delivery Unit chief executive officer. He drove back from Johor to pay his last respects.

JPT director-general Prof Datuk Dr Morshidi Sirat describes Dr Radin Umar as an exemplary and visionary leader who was action-oriented.

Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohamed Khaled Nordin says his death is a great loss to the country.

"He was the ministry's driving force, and developed and implemented several strategies," said Mohamed Khaled, who was previously higher education minister.

Strong legacy

In fact, former deputy higher education minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah feels that one of Dr Radin Umar's greatest legacies was the work he did on graduates' soft skills, which has been implemented in public universities and is already seeing positive results.

"He worked hard on this instrument which has seven elements including leadership, ethics, community service and communication skills," he says.

UPM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Mohd Fauzi Ramlan says the university has lost a great friend, leader and mentor.

"We will continue with the excellent legacy he put in place in UPM," he adds.

Education Ministry deputy director-general (Public Universities) Datin Dr Siti Hamisah Tapsir says Dr Radin Umar rebranded higher education in the country.

"He was very objective and professional, and will be a difficult leader to replace," she says.

USM vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Omar Osman in a text message from Mecca, says that Dr Radin Umar was still full of ideas when he visited him recently.

"He was committed to seeing the fruits of his dedication to higher education and road safety being realised," he says.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia vice-chancellor Prof Tan Sri Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin says he respected the different talents in people and knew how to bring out the best in everyone to realise the objectives of the higher education strategic plan.

"I will miss his humility and good naturedness," she says.

Sunway Education Group senior executive director Elizabeth Lee feels the country has lost a great academic who was a forward think-

er and an avid doer.

"He was a true educationist. I have lost a dear friend whose deeds inspire me to give more of myself as he has done for the nation," she adds.

Road safety expert

Taylor's University vice-chancellor and president Prof Datuk Dr Hassan Said who had known Dr Radin Umar for many years, says he put many strategies in place to strengthen Malaysia as a higher education hub.

"He was also a prominent expert in road safety," he says, adding that he attended Dr Radin Umar's funeral at the UPM Muslim cemetery last Sunday.

Dr Radin Umar whose specialisation was in road safety engineering, was previously appointed by the Cabinet to head an independent inquiry board investigating a bus crash in Cameron Highlands in 2010.

USM School of Civil Engineering dean Prof Dr Ahmad Farhan Mohd Sadullah says Dr Radin Umar was known globally for his efforts in road safety.

He introduced the first exclusive motorcycle lane in the country and the world, an action that has managed to reduce motorcycle crashes and casualties drastically.

"In the early days, we focused on road safety in a fragmented way.

"Dr Radin Umar introduced an integrated approach internationally known as the Haddon Matrix in Malaysia in 1995, and the results began to show in 1997," he says.

Prof Ahmad Farhan who served as Miros director-general from August 2008 to July 2011, says he met Dr Radin Umar in 1997 as they both worked in highway and transportation engineering.

"We were fellow academics who used to meet at conferences. We co-supervised and also examined each other's students.

"We were in the same committees covering transport, engineering and academia," he says.

He adds that among Dr Radin Umar's biggest achievements at Miros were the institutionalisation of the accident investigation procedures and the inquiries to be carried out by relevant authorities.

A big contribution by Dr Radin Umar was also the inclusion of the road safety education syllabus in national primary and secondary school curriculum from 2009.

"Road safety education is a long term measure to change the culture towards safety. It was an uphill battle to be able to bring it into the national school syllabus.

"Road safety elements were put in the Bahasa Malaysia component and was a collaborative effort with the Education Ministry," he adds.

Prof Ahmad Farhan says he used to consult Dr Radin Umar when he served as Miros director-general as he was the *guru* for road safety.

"If I may sum up our relationship at Miros... he had a dream and I tried to deliver that dream," he shares.

Dr Radin Umar leaves behind his wife Datin Norsham Ahmad, five children and four grandchildren.

His son Mundzir Radin Umar says his father died of liver failure at Serdang Hospital last Sunday morning where he had been hospitalised for the last three weeks.

"He was diagnosed with colon cancer in February 2010, which then spread and affected his liver," he says.

Happy to help out

*StarEducat*e journalists always found Dr Radin Umar to be friendly, approachable and ever ready to explain the different issues and concepts.

The last time the writer was in contact with Dr Radin Umar was just before Hari Raya when he said how happy he was to be discharged from the hospital and celebrating with his family at home.

He said he could forget the pain he was in when he spent time with his grandchildren.

Despite his stance on university rankings, he knew I wrote on the topic and would either let me know an announcement was imminent or take the time to send comments on how UPM was ranked no matter where he was in the world.

He was very excited when UPM created history in Malaysia by being the first higher education institution through its Putra Business School to receive accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business last year and sent me a text message to write about it.

May he rest in peace.