

Unimas staff not taking too kindly to sudden departure of new vice-chancellor

By YU JI

yuji@thestar.com.my

KUCHING: Prof Dr Morshidi Sirat, who was appointed as the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak's (Unimas) new vice-chancellor on April 1, has left the position.

The acclaimed academic, formerly with Penang's Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), has been promoted to the position of director-general of the Higher Education Department.

Prof Morshidi was appointed to lead Unimas exactly two weeks ago. Speaking to reporters then, he said Unimas' development should be re-evaluated.

He also said he was working on a study commissioned by the Higher Education Ministry on a review of the national higher education strategic plan, adding Unimas would be, "the core institution that will help me as I lead the study".

But by last Friday, talk of Prof Morshidi's abrupt departure was widely speculated

among university's staff.

When contacted for his comment yesterday, Prof Morshidi did not deny that he would assume the new position in Kuala Lumpur today.

Prof Morshidi, who is taking over from Prof Datuk Dr Rujhan Mustafa, is widely regarded as one of the key individuals behind USM's success to become one of the best public universities in the country.

Unimas' academic staff have not taken too kindly to Prof Morshidi's sudden departure.

A lecturer told *The Star* over the weekend that the helm of Unimas was being treated like a game of musical chairs.

The lecturer also said the staff members were disheartened and frustrated "with such poor decision-making".

At the same time, it is learnt that Prof Morshidi would be replaced by Prof Datuk Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi from Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka.

> TURN TO PAGE 56



Weeks earlier: Outgoing Unimas vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Khairuddin Ab Hamid (left) at the official handing over of duty to Prof Morshidi witnessed by Unimas board of directors chairman Datuk Dr Hatta Solhi (second left) and member Datuk JC Fong in this file pic.

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> FROM PAGE S1

Prof Kadim could not be reached for comment.

Meanwhile, Unimas Academic Staff Association president Dr Azham Zulharnain when contacted yesterday, said he was "shocked" and "saddened" to lose "such a great academic from Unimas in such a short time".

"Most of us found out late on Friday. I think we were confused and feeling quite helpless. There was no explanation until the official announcement by the Human Resource Department this morning (yesterday)," said the biotechnology lecturer.

"Prof Morshidi's reputation and his coming here gave us a lot of motivation to make Unimas better. We were looking forward

to working with him. USM is one of the top universities in Malaysia. We thought we would get some USM-ism leadership. Not only that, Prof Morshidi is the author of recommendations and guidelines of the Government.

"Most lecturers had not had the pleasure of talking to Prof Morshidi. I was one of the few who did sit down with him. (After Friday) I did e-mail him, partly to congratulate him. He replied with thanks but there was no explanation. It's a decision at the higher level I suppose. There is no point fighting on this issue. I don't think we can get him back," Azham said.

On the next vice-chancellor, Azham said Unimas' dedicated academic staff looked forward to working with Prof Kadim.