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NEW DRB-HICOM CHAIRMAN PLEDGES TO CONTINUE YAHAYA AHMAD'S LEGACY

By: Jeffri Mohd Rafiee & Yati Md Yassin

SHAH ALAM, March 6 (Bernama) -- The newly-appointed chairman of the DRB-Hicom group, Datuk Mohd Saleh Sulong, today pledged to continue the late Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad's legacy.

"We have to continue the legacy of Tan Sri Yahaya, what he has built and what he has worked hard for. So, we have to ensure and preserve this DRB-Hicom group," he told a press conference here announcing his appointment to replace Yahaya who died in a helicopter crash on Monday.

"We will carry on this legacy. What will happen to this child who is hardly one year old, metaphorically speaking," he added in reference to the DRB-Hicom Group which emerged early last year.

The DRB-Hicom group, which was built together by Yahaya and Mohd Saleh, has become the leading transport conglomerate in the country within a short time span. It now commands 60 percent of Malaysia's automobile industry in every segment following the government's divestment of 32 a percent equity interest in Hicom Holdings Bhd in late 1995.

Mohd Saleh said Yahaya left behind a legacy of very high standards, selfless dedication and unremitting pursuit of corporate and entrepreneurial excellence.

Yahaya's leadership, drive and clarity of purpose deeply inspired the best in his colleagues and subordinates and the respect he earned both at home and internationally, Saleh said.

"This will indeed be a difficult act to follow," he said.

Mohd Saleh is the close colleague and business partner of Yahaya when they started up the group in the early 1980s through the Master-Carriage group which currently holds private companies of both of them.

Both Yahaya and Saleh had a unique working relationship and both of them went through the tough recession of the mid-80s. They went into full gear and culminated in the emergence of the DRB-Hicom group in the late 1995.

"Personally, all of us suffer from the tragic loss of Tan Sri Yahaya. Nevertheless, the business of the group has to continue, will have to go on," Mohd Saleh said.

He said any good and well-managed organisation or country must be prepared with its line of succession.

Mohd Saleh was appointed chairman of Diversified Resources Bhd, Gadek (Malaysia) Bhd, Gadek Capital Bhd and Kedah Cement Holdings Bhd besides his appointment as president and chairman of Hicom Holdings Bhd.

The prime minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, had also given his blessings and endorsement for Saleh to be chairman of Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) and Edaran Otomobil Nasional Bhd (EON) as well.

Mohd Saleh, who had a meeting with Dr Mahathir this afternoon, said the latter had confirmed that the government would continue to fully support the DRB-Hicom group in the interest of the country. (Kerajaan akan terus membantu and memberi sokongan sepenuhnya kepada pihak DRB-Hicom group demi kepentingan negara)

"I appreciate the value the assurance of governmental support to the group's enterprises by the leadership of the country," he added.

Mohd Saleh also said that in assuming the chairmanship of the group, he would be guided by and conscious of the vision and directions set by Yahaya.

He said, "I am happy to say that these visions and directions are not

alien to me as over the years during my lengthy association with him, I had the benefit of consultations, discussions and counselling with him.

"I might even add that some of the ideas and programmes being implemented by the group were the result of these intimate discussion and consultation between the two of us.

"I treasure this kinship that I had with him as it had formed the foundation of the continuity of vision and mission for us in undertaking the tasks and responsibility."

He said the organisational structure, systems and processes laid down by Yahaya were well prepared and capable of meeting future challenges.

In a show of unequivocal support by the group's 36,000 workforce in Mohd Saleh to continue the vision and corporate goals of the group, almost all the chief executive officers of the group were present at the conference. -- BERNAMA

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