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Saleh: Keep faith in DRB-Hicom (HL)

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DRB-Hicom Group's new chairman, Datuk Saleh Sulong, has pledged that "all projects and all business at hand will continue" as planned.

Saleh called on shareholders to keep their faith in the group's ability to perform without Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad, whose death last week prompted the group to request suspension of trading in the shares of its nine companies on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE).

"The shareholders should not allow negative sentiments to force them to do anything which will result in the diminishing of their shareholding in the group.

"My message to the shareholders is please do not think that the future of the companies under the DRB-Hicom Group will be jeopardised... maintain your faith in the ability of the various companies to perform and deliver," Saleh said.

Shares in Diversified Resources Bhd (DRB), Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton), Hicom Holdings Bhd, Kedah Cement Bhd, Gadek (M) Bhd, Gadek Capital Bhd, Edaran Otomobil Nasional Bhd, and associated companies Golden Pharos Bhd and Eastern Pacific Industrial Corp Bhd were suspended from trading since Tuesday following news of Yahaya's death in a helicopter crash in Pahang on Monday night.

All nine counters are expected to be requoted today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who has endorsed Saleh's appointment, is scheduled to address the senior management of the group tomorrow "to assure them of the Government's support and confidence in the group."

Saleh said his first major test will be to rally everyone around the group and boost the confidence of the shareholders.

"After that, it will be to get on with the business of the day.

"We have so many projects in hand, we cannot afford to be so despondent that we feel hopeless because Yahaya is no longer around."

Saleh, who will have to work in the shadow of the late industrialist and larger-than-life industry icon, has already initiated some changes to the management structure.

"I may want to change things a little bit," he said.

Effective last Friday, four senior group directors now report directly to the chairman. They are Maznah Abdul Jalil (corporate finance and advisory), Datuk Ismayuddin Abdul Manan (operations), Datuk Tik Mustaffa (properties and services), and Mohd Nor Mohamad (legal affairs and management support).

"Previously, it was very lineal with the chairman and managing director at the top. But since I know how heavy it is for one person to be handling it all, we have decided to farm out the workload.

"There may or may not be a group managing director later."

Describing the change as "delayerisation", Saleh said it had to be done quickly to stabilise the organisation as the uncertainty could not be allowed to persist.

The fundamentals are strong and the group has the continued support of the Government. "This much I can say, given the assurances of Dr Mahathir and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

"I believe the fact that I have been chosen means they want to see continuity, although I am also a shareholder, but not as much as Yahaya."

He added that the management of the various companies in the group

remains intact and the managers and workers have pledged their commitment to continue working hard.

This means that the agenda and courses of action that the company has decided upon will continue as planned.

Yahaya, he added, had successfully put in place a very strong organisational structure.

"It would be a discredit to Yahaya to expect the empire he created to crumble the very minute he is no longer around. This, I must stress, will not happen.

"The void was immediately filled because we owe it to the shareholders, our 36,000 employees, and the nation. There are many projects undertaken by the group that are of national interest and which affect the livelihood of so many people."

Among them are the manufacturing of the national car, Kriss national motorcycle and the capital's bus system. "The group has to survive without him."

Saleh also dismissed rumours that others might take over the group and that the Government intends to farm out the companies within the group to certain individuals.

"People will be sceptical about how well we can perform because I will be compared to Yahaya. But it is not just me.

"Anybody who comes into this position will be compared to Yahaya. In the meantime, names will be mentioned. This person will take over, that person will take over. Some even say the Government will farm out the companies to this or that person.

"But why should the Government want to do that?"