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## The legacies of a corporate star

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MUCH has been said and written about the late Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad, who died in a helicopter crash on Monday night, and more is likely to be said and written in the days and weeks to come.

He will be remembered for years to come as the brightest corporate star to die so tragically at a time when everything seemed to be going his way. He leaves legacies that will from time to time remind us of his life and times.

Already the Terengganu Government has announced that the main road in Dungun and the mosque being built in Kampung Kijang, Marang, will be named after him. The mosque he donated to Marang residents will stand as a reminder of his generosity.

But most of all, Yahaya will be remembered for his plans to make Malaysia a global player in the automobile industry in the WTO (World Trade Organisation) era.

His name will continue to be associated with Proton, Lotus, Bandar Proton, Intrakota, Alam Flora and many more. Not least, he will be remembered as a business executive who had, for decades, remained in relative obscurity only to burst into the limelight with the brilliance of a shooting star.

Until five years ago, Tan Sri Yahaya - fondly referred to by friends and associates as "Tok Ya" (short for Datuk Yahaya) - was more often heard than seen.

While the curious asked loudly who he was, peppering their questions with unfriendly remarks, others spoke admiringly of an automotive engineer with a golden touch.

I came in contact with him at about that time but did not get to know and understand this ever-smiling, youthful-looking businessman until the nomination day of the 1995 general election.

He had flown in from Kuala Lumpur - in a helicopter - to join a handful of other Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera businessmen in lending support to the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was seeking re-election in the Kubang Pasu parliamentary constituency in Kedah.

The gathering of the rich and famous from Kuala Lumpur at the entrance to the Kubang Pasu district office building in Jitra had an added significance given what had happened the night before.

While waiting for nominations to be closed, Yahaya and several other businessmen decided to stroll a short distance to Jitra town for a cup of coffee. I was invited to come along. The coffeeshop was in fact a small stall under a shady ketapang (*terminalia catappa* or sea almond) tree.

The owner of the stall went about quite routinely and leisurely serving coffee, tea and soft drinks oblivious to the fact that seated at his stall were some of the richest and most powerful businessmen in the country.