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Award for Rahman a fitting tribute for overcoming challenges

WHEN former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad started the national car project in the early 1980s, it was to create a catalyst for industrialisation which was the goal of Vision 2020.

Through such a project came diverse industrial activities and acquisition of technologies which would advance the nation.

While much has been said about the success of the national car companies, the role of the leaders in such companies has not been highlighted much.

It is a testimony to their capabilities that such companies have flourished and advanced rapidly even though, as a car-manufacturing nation, Malaysia is relatively young.

We have not had the pool of people who have grown up in the automotive industry and so most of those who have led the companies have had the additional challenge of learning about this industry - the world's largest - quickly and to lead their companies at the same time.

It was most appropriate then that in the New Straits Times-Mastercard Car of the Year 2003 Awards, Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Omar, managing director of Perodua, was named "Motoring Man of the Year".

It is fitting tribute to the man who has been at the helm of Perodua for the past seven years and took it to greater heights, as well as making significant contributions to the Malaysian automotive industry.

In choosing Rahman for the award, the panel of judges recognised that he had "successfully steered the second national car company to a well-recognised position in Malaysia.

Not only has he led Perodua to a stronger position in the domestic car industry but also prepared it for the challenges of Afta and beyond.

One of the most significant moves taken by Rahman and his team was to form a strategic alliance with Daihatsu of Japan which would ensure that the Malaysian company would have continued access to new automotive technologies.

In fact, with Daihatsu as a partner, Perodua now has an even stronger position in Asean because it is the only company making compact cars in the region.

During the difficult times of the economic crisis of the late 1990s, Rahman faced the tough challenges of keeping the company on track and ensured that it emerged in a healthy state.

He made sure the valuable lessons of that period were learnt and one of the outcomes is the company's strategic "Ke Arah 333" plan to capture 30 per cent of the domestic market, reduce costs by 30 per cent, and be in the top 3 in terms of customer satisfaction.

Not one to spend time just sitting in his office, Rahman makes his regular rounds visiting various departments and giving personal attention to issues that arise.

He makes it a point to hold regular discussions with the management team to ensure that the company's operations are running smoothly.

It is therefore not surprising that in the short span of time, the company had managed to put 738,000 units of Perodua vehicles on the road.

Rahman recently revealed that this year would be his final year with the company as he is due for a well-earned retirement.

He is confident that the company is ready for the challenges to come not only because it is on a firm footing but also due to the dedication and

commitment of everyone at Perodua.