

**Trio bag prestigious Merdeka Award**  
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KUALA LUMPUR: Three outstanding individuals received the prestigious Merdeka Award for their contributions to the fields of research and development, education and forest conservation.

Palm oil research pioneer Tan Sri Dr Augustine Ong, contemporary Islamic scholar and thinker Tan Sri Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Indonesian scientist/ecologist Dr Engkik Soepadmo received a trophy, an art piece cash prize of RM500,000 each from Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas here last night.

Ong, 78, who has 14 patents in palm oil technology, was honoured in the health, science and technology category.

"Palm oil is nature's gift to Malaysia, and Malaysia's gift to the world. This award will spur me on to discover many more properties of this wonderful gift," he said.

Dr Syed Muhammad, who received the award under the Outstanding Scholastic Achievement category, was responsible for the conceptualisation of the Islamic university and is founder of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation.

Dr Soepadmo received the Outstanding Contribution to the People of Malaysia award for his contribution to research and conservation of Malaysia's forest plant diversity.

Najib said the commitment and pursuit for excellence shown by the recipients were critical for Malaysia in building and sustaining a knowledge-based economy.

"To remain relevant in the rapidly changing global economy, our skills and knowledge cannot be static; they must evolve and grow for the benefit of our people, businesses and nation," he said.

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