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DR MAHATHIR OPENS M'SIA'S BOOK VILLAGE

LANGKAWI, Dec 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today opened Malaysia's book village fringing the Lubok Semilang waterfalls here.

The project, the brainchild of Kedah Menteri Besar Kedah Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, is the world's seventh book village.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail were also present.

In a souvenir programme marking its official opening, Sanusi said there are six "homes" there now all taken up by book publishers like the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

It would eventually have altogether 40 homes soon, he said.

Sanusi said in promoting Langkawi as a tourist destination brochures on the island would be distributed to all book villages and towns world-wide which received about 25 million visitors.

Belgium has a book village in Redu while there is a book town in Bredevoort, Holland.

The world's first book village was founded about 25 years ago in Hay-on-Hye on the England-Wales border.

Dr Mahathir is here with wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali to attend the 1997 Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA) exhibition.

He also chaired today's Cabinet weekly meeting at the Gunung Raya resort here.

In his speech opening the book village, Dr Mahathir said by developing a reading habit to expand their knowledge Malaysians would become a progressive nation.

"Once we become a knowledgeable nation, we'll be able to tackle many arising problems in life," he said.

He urged Malaysians to make reading their habit by taking along books wherever they go.

Dr Mahathir said it was a misconception among some narrow-minded Muslims that Islam only teaches the followers to only read the Quran and religious books.

Muslims, he said, should read widely in line with the first verse of the Quran which urges them to read.

Dr Mahathir said the calm and serene environment of the book village would be conducive to the thinking process in acquiring knowledge.

He believed the book village would also attract to Langkawi foreign tourists who were always questing for knowledge.

Malaysians would benefit from this by way of interacting and exchanging views as well as knowledge with the tourists, he added.-- BERNAMA

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