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Read more to increase knowledge: Mahathir

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday urged Malaysians to read to increase their knowledge and "jumpstart their thinking process".

"It is also a way of spending time productively," he said when opening a Book Village at Lubuk Semilang in Langkawi yesterday on the sidelines of the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (Lima'97).

The 500-acre book village, a brainchild of Kedah Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, is modelled after the book villages in the Netherlands, Belgium and Wales. It is the first of its kind in the region and the seventh in the world.

Dr Mahathir, an avid reader himself, said Malaysians should not, however, confine themselves to a limited source of reading materials. In the case of Muslims, for example, the Quran should not be their only reading material.

"The first sentence in the Quran is `Iqra', which means read. There is nothing in the Quran that says one should not read other reading materials than the Quran.

"We cannot interpret this (`Iqra') narrow-mindedly," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he likes to read books but takes a long time to finish one unlike Sanusi who can finish "reading" a 500-page book in three minutes. He described Sanusi's capability as "extraordinary."

He said one should always have a book for companion and read during his leisure.

He also urged Malaysians to take advantage of the book village, which he believed would enable the locals to mingle with the foreigners and share experiences.

He also asked visitors to the book village to keep the surrounding areas clean. "This is a nice place and will be a better place if we keep it clean. We have to learn to be cleaner people and that there is no one to pick after us."

The book village is located at the foothill of Lubuk Semilang, with a nearby waterfall and a small stream amid a lush vegetation. This provides a conducive environment for book-lovers.

There are six houses on the 35-acre site built to accommodate books of various subjects and languages. The target is to have 40 such houses by the year 2000.

Langkawi Book Village management secretary Sohaimi Zainal Abidin said six independent book sellers have also set up shop at the village. They are Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Darulfikir, Pustaka Union, Lava, Popular Book Company and Pustaka Alhas/Hizbi.

Some RM5 million have been invested in the village. "After this we plan to lease the land to banks and institutions," he said.

During the ceremony, Dr Mahathir received a cheque for US\$5,000 (US\$1 = RM3.64) on behalf of the Book Village from Arianespace for the purchase of two computers. The Golden Kids News team also presented Sanusi with two computers for the Village's electronic library.

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