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Major encyclopaedia on Malaysia launched

Chok Suat Ling

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak launched today the first five volumes of the The Encyclopedia of Malaysia - the largest original reference work on the country.

It is published under the patronage of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

There are 15 volumes in the series, each dealing with a single subject area on the rich diversity of the country, its special physical and natural heritage, history, economics, politics and culture.

The second batch of five volumes is scheduled for publication in mid-1999. The final batch is due to appear at the end of next year.

The encyclopaedia, which is published by Archipelago Press in English, also deals with some of the issues faced by rapidly developing countries.

A Bahasa Malaysia edition and a CD-ROM version are being planned. The project co-ordinator is Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir.

The encyclopaedia is available at all major bookstores from tomorrow at RM95 per volume or RM475 for the whole set.

Najib said it offered the most up-to-date information available from the academic, technical and professional worlds.

"The volumes reflect local perspectives for the first time, and highlight aspects of topics which are unique to Malaysia.

"For instance, under 'Animals' in Volume 3, we learn that Malaysia is home to the largest moth in the world and also to what is supposed to be the world's most beautiful butterfly, that Malaysia has one of the world's two species of bedbugs, and has the most number of mongoose," Najib said at Hotel Istana.

More than 400 authors, including 17 volume and co-volume editors, drawn mostly from tertiary and research institutions, government bodies and private organisations have been commissioned to contribute their expertise.

Najib said in addition to the volume editors and authors, an Editorial Advisory Board, made up of figures from academic and public life, had given advice on the direction and content of the project.

"A large team of designers, illustrators and photographers have also contributed their talents."

DRB-Hicom Group, GEC-Marconi Projects (M) Sdn Bhd, Malayan United Industries Bhd, Malaysia National Insurance Berhad, Pernas International Holdings Bhd, Petronas Bhd, Renong Bhd, SungeiWay Group, Tenaga Nasional Bhd, United Overseas Bank Group, Yayasan Albukhary and YTL Corporation Bhd had also contributed to the development costs.

Najib said learning resources, in all its forms, make a great contribution to the education process.

"The development of a country can be measured not only by its physical development but also by its cultural development, including the number of books it produces and the number it puts to use through schools, libraries and book outlets."

Najib said the book publishing industry in the country was, however, still relatively young.

"It is mostly concerned with the publication of textbooks and supplementary texts for schools, including workbooks and revision aids.

"The publishing of general reading materials is thought unprofitable unless the book deals with contemporary issues or well-known

personalities."

Nevertheless, he said, the Malaysian book publishing industry had grown enormously over the past 30 years.

"In the 1970s, on average, about 1,200 new titles were published per year. In the 1980s, it was 3,200 per year," he said, adding that in the present decade, about 4,000 were published per year.

Najib also voiced concern that the reading habit was still not an integral part of the Malaysian lifestyle.

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