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Book collection campaign extended by another month

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Rural Development Ministry will extend its book collection campaign which ends on Sept 30 by another month, as it has yet to reach its target of one million books.

Its Minister, Datuk Annuar Musa, said the poor response was probably due to "a lack of awareness" among the public and private sectors on the benefits of the campaign towards rural folk and their children.

"Our objective is to set up 1,100 reading corners at longhouses, roadside coffeeshops, community halls and other areas where villagers and youths like to congregate, to encourage them to acquire the reading habit.

"By allowing them easy access to reading material, the Ministry hopes they would be eager to seek more knowledge to develop themselves."

The campaign was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in August and it was supposed to end on Sept 30. However, the Ministry has decided to extend it to Oct 31.

Speaking at a book presentation ceremony organised by Universiti Malaya's co-operative bookshop today, Annuar said knowledge was an important requisite for the development of an individual.

"The physical development of rural areas can be carried out with sufficient allocation of funds but the development of its residents can only be achieved through the inculcation of knowledge."

He said as long as the Malays held steadfast to negative values, they could not develop themselves to become a progressive race.

"Negative habits like hanging out at coffeeshops, playing draughts and gambling until the early hours of the day and being involved in social ills, should be discouraged. Instead the Malays should inculcate the reading habit as a daily activity."

Educated Malay youths are also needed for the successful implementation of the Ministry's poverty eradication and Desa Wawasan programmes throughout the country.

"These programmes are meant to uplift the living standards of rural residents and it needs the co-operation of everyone including the respective villages' community development and safety committees.

"At the moment, agricultural land in rural areas have become idle while the implementation of our development programmes are solely dependant on Government agencies."

Over the past five years, he said the Ministry had managed to set up 189 reading corners - well below its target of 1,000 centres, due to lack of allocation to build proper libraries.

"We faced difficulties obtaining funds and permission to construct the buildings as the process took very long. This time, we intend to seek the co-operation of every individual, private companies and commercial establishments, to contribute towards this beneficial cause.

"There are many agencies, publishing houses and printing companies which have stocks of unsold books and outdated editions lying in their warehouses, which can be contributed towards the campaign.

"What is the use of books if they are not read? It would be best to donate these books for rural residents to read."

At the ceremony, Annuar received 3,000 books from Royal Professor Ungku Abdul Aziz, who is also chairman of Universiti Malaya's co-operative bookshop.

In his speech, Ungku Aziz said one way to encourage rural Malays to

acquire the reading habit was by making books easily available to them.

"Books are an important instrument to create thinking minds."

Once books are easily available in rural areas, the residents will be encouraged to read them and discuss its contents.

"This will be a start towards inculcating the habit to seek further knowledge to improve oneself."

Ungku Aziz said although the country was gearing itself to enter the information technology era, computers could never replace books as a source of knowledge and for reading pleasure.

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