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LEAD Mahathir-Books

DR MAHATHIR LAUNCHES BOOK DONATION CAMPAIGN

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today launched the Book Donation Campaign aimed at collecting over 1 million books for distribution to the rural areas.

In his message in the souvenir programme for the launch, he said although Malaysia could be proud of its high literacy rate of 93 per cent, studies showed that on the average, Malaysians read only two books a year.

"This means that the reading habit among Malaysians is still low, hence more serious efforts must be made to inculcate the love for reading," he said.

He said it was hoped that the campaign would increase the collection of books and magazines which are useful and needed by the rural community and those in the remote areas and welfare homes.

"I call on all parties to come forward and donate books as a noble effort in fulfilling their social responsibilities," he said.

Dr Mahathir kicked off the two-month campaign by donating 12 books which he placed in a collection box at the Petronas service station in Taman Sri Hartamas here.

The books included *Gone With The Wind*, *A Safe Area*, *Islam and The Economic Challenge* and *Mastering Modern English Usage*.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and other cabinet ministers also contributed their share.

During the campaign, the public can leave new or used books at any Petronas service station or Pos Malaysia office nationwide.

The campaign, which ends on Sept 30, is jointly organised by the Rural Development Ministry, Petronas, Pos Malaysia, the National Library, Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) and Astro.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa said the campaign was aimed at collecting over a million books for distribution to the rural areas including longhouses, estates, old folks homes and drug rehabilitation centres.

He said the ministry hoped to increase the number of rural libraries from the current 200 to 1,000 by year end.

The campaign might be made an annual affair as part of the Reading Month in August and the Anti-Illiteracy Campaign in September, he said.

-- BERNAMA

MAM JK