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`Malaysians yet to acquire reading habit'

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said although Malaysia has a high literacy rate of 93 per cent, Malaysians have yet to inculcate the reading habits.

"They only read an average of two books a year, which is considered low," he said in a souvenir programme in conjunction with the launching of a two-month books donation campaign in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Thus, Dr Mahathir said there should be a more concerted effort in trying to inculcate the reading habits among Malaysians.

In this regard, the Prime Minister said such a nation-wide books donation campaign was timely.

"It is hoped that through such campaign, this will increase a collection of books and provide more reading materials for the public, especially for the rural folks.

"Thus, I hope the public will donate their books," he added.

At the launching, Dr Mahathir himself donated 12 books.

The campaign, which is scheduled to end on September 30, is jointly-organised by All Asia Broadcast Centre (Astro) and Petronas, in association with the Rural Development Ministry, Pos Malaysia, the National Library and Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

Under the scheme, the public can drop off new or used books at Petronas service stations or Pos Malaysia offices throughout the country.

Books collected will be distributed by Astro and Petronas to various pre-identified charitable organisations and public libraries.

Astro has already earmarked selected orphanages to benefit from donated books.

A group of orphans will also be invited to Astro broadcast centre on October 3, which coincides with World Children's Day.

Meanwhile, Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa said the organisers hoped to collect more than one million books from the books donation campaign and distribute it to a total of 1,001 pre-identified libraries and charitable organisations. "Through such campaign, the ministry also hoped to be able to increase the number of libraries in rural areas from the existing 200 to 1,000 units by the end of the year."

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