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PM starts campaign to promote reading habit

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today although Malaysia could be proud of its 93 per cent literacy rate, the reading habit among Malaysians was far too low.

"Malaysians only read an average of two books a year," Dr Mahathir said in the souvenir programme for the Book Donation Campaign which he launched at the Taman Sri Hartamas Petronas service station.

"We have to take serious measures to inculcate the reading habit among Malaysians."

He hoped that through the Book Donation Campaign, more books and reading materials could be collected for distribution in rural areas and to charitable homes.

The campaign is organised by Astro and Petronas in association with the Rural Development Ministry, Pos Malaysia Bhd, National Library and Radio Televisyen Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir who praised the Ministry for organising the campaign which began today and would end on Sept 30, appealed to all parties to come forward and exercise their social responsibilities by donating their books.

Dr Mahathir donated books and released a helium balloon bearing the campaign banner, to officially launch the drive.

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 at the Petronas stations will be distributed by Pos Malaysia, Astro and Petronas to identified charitable homes or public libraries.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa later told a Press conference that the books would also be stored at the National Library and distributed to 1,001 reading centres and libraries nationwide.

"They are mostly in the rural areas," he said, adding that it would also cover longhouses, estates, old folks' homes and dadah rehabilitation centres.

He hoped that more than a million books could be collected during the two-month period.

Annuar urged members of the public to donate their books for the good cause.

He said the campaign would be held in August and September every year.

"This is to coincide with the Reading Month in August and the Anti-Illiteracy Month in September," he said.

He said only 198 reading centres were set up in the rural areas over the past five years, and that the growth rate of such centres was far too slow.

At today's launch, Ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, donated books.

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