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Field day for bookworms

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THE Malaysia International Book Fair '99, which starts today, will showcase more than 100,000 titles and electronic titles, at the MINES Showroom in Seri Kembangan, Selangor.

About 200,000 people are expected to visit the nine-day fair, the second of the series, incorporating the Electronics Book Fair '99. It has attracted more than 400 exhibitors from both local and foreign companies.

The foreign exhibitors come from Britain, the United States, Canada, India, Singapore, Hong Kong, China and Taiwan.

On display will be a wide range of titles and is apt in keeping with the theme of the fair - "Towards A Reading Society".

There will be a good mix of Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Tamil reading and audio materials which cater to all ages.

The organisers - Facon Exhibition and Trade Fairs (M) Sdn Bhd, Output Combination Sdn Bhd and Sin Chew Jit Poh - have given their best to ensure the fair will be the best ever and the largest to be held in the country.

Facon Exhibition and Trade Fairs has organised numerous exhibitions and conferences in Asia and many of these events have enjoyed the endorsement of Government agencies in the respective countries.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his message, said the book fair comes at no better time as Malaysia is recovering from the regional economic hiccups and continues the push for industrialised-nation status by the year 2020.

"To achieve this, Malaysians need to be better educated, better trained and more well informed.

"One of the ways to produce intellectual and skilled personnel is for Malaysians to inculcate the reading habit.

"I am gratified that the objective in organising this event, besides promoting reading materials, is to encourage reading among Malaysians," stated Dr Mahathir, noting that the fair was being also held in conjunction with National Reading Week.

Malaysia today is a big market for publishers, book retailers and importers, and the Government is giving more funding to boost the 93 per cent literacy rate among the population.

Therefore, local and international publishers, retailers and related traders participating in the book fair stand to benefit.

The first international book fair, held last year, was a resounding success with thousands of visitors attending daily.

The 100,000 titles on display will cover areas such as information technology, business, medicine, engineering, hobbies and children's books.

Facon general manager Wong Kum San said many of these titles would be in the form of CD-ROMs and visitors could make a quick reference on selected titles.

Wong said this will be a good opportunity for bookworms to get their favourite books at a much reduced price as some of the exhibitors will be offering 10 to 30 per cent discounts on selected titles.

Many of the IT-based items will also be on CD-ROMs and there will be a cyber cafe in the venue.

Underlining the importance and contribution to society, the Malaysia International Book Fair '99 is endorsed by the Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation and fully supported by the New Straits Times and the Berita Harian.

There will be various activities including colouring contests for children, autograph-signing sessions by authors, a yo-yo competition and lucky draws.

One of the largest local exhibitors - Popular Book Company, which celebrates its 75th anniversary - is set to dazzle the crowds with its wide range of reading materials.

The organisers hope to use the book fair to collect old books for distribution to schools and charitable homes.

Wong said visitors can drop their books at the used book collection centre.

"We expect the fair to attract a large crowd and their response towards the charity project will further enhance our effort to help the needy to cultivate good reading habits.

"At the end of the nine-day fair, we will go through the books donated by the visitors and categorise them before distribution."

For more information on the fair, contact Facon at Tel: 03-7818766, fax: 03-7818771 or e-mail: facon@po.jaring.my.

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