

Dr M takes time off to read to blind children

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KUALA LUMPUR: It was a red-letter day for 26 blind children when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad read a book to them yesterday.

Dr Mahathir read the story *Mengapa Zirafah Berleher Panjang* (Why A Giraffe Has A Long Neck) for 20 minutes to the children at the Malaysian Association for the Blind office in Brickfields here.

The Reading for the Blind Children is a programme jointly organised by Puteri Umno and the Umno Civil Action Bureau.

The children, aged between six and 15, were from the association and Sekolah Kebangsaan Pendidikan Khas Jalan Batu in Jalan Raja Laut.

One of them, Danial Arif, nine, stood up and expressed his gratitude to Dr Mahathir for taking time off to read to them. A recording of the reading by Dr Mahathir will be kept in the association's library.

The Prime Minister later visited the association's workshop to see how the blind make chairs, and the information technology centre before having breakfast with the children.

Puteri Umno pro tem committee chairman Azalina Othman Said said the strategy was to include Umno leaders and members in charity programmes. "The Prime Minister has agreed to it," she added.

Among Umno leaders who will also be reading to blind children are Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Nazri Abdul Aziz and Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Sulaiman Mohamed.

Azalina said the programme, which begun in March, would be ongoing.

"Besides charity programmes, the movement will give emphasis on education and health projects. Political activities will not be too intensive.

"As opposed to the opposition parties, we will not politicise every issue. We intend to create a generation of caring young women," she said.

She said the movement's future programmes would be for the disadvantaged and the poor.

"Such programmes will also be implemented at the state level," she added.