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Mahathir-Literary

WRITERS, LITERARY FIGURES HAVE ROLE IN CREATING SINGLE RACE, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight literary figures and writers in this region can play a role to help leaders in their countries to create a single race with one identity.

"In our efforts to develop a race with one identity, we need to know the history, cultural values and its continuity," he said when opening an international seminar on Southeast Asian Literature at a leading hotel here.

The text of his speech was read out by Education Minister Tan Sri Musa Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir said like the western community, the majority of the people in this region looked at the Southeast Asian history based on the big monuments of world civilisations like the Hindu, Buddha and Christian but did not see the greatness of their own culture and way of life.

He said although story versions or the literature differed from one country to another, the contents of the message to be conveyed were the same.

Dr Mahathir hoped that literary figures and writers would not adopt a negative stand by encouraging undesirable values and ignoring noble norms.

He said the unhealthy morality was copied from the western society which glorified personal liberty, freedom of expression and not bothered about collective responsibility.

Such elements, if not kept under check, could pose a danger to the values and principles of the Southeast Asian society, he said.

"It will be good for writers in Southeast Asia if they can discipline themselves to have their own self-control mechanism to write on things that are not contrary to tradition and local customs.

"Instead, they should pick topics or issues more suited to the norms and culture of the society in this part of the world," he said.

He also urged writers and literary figures in this region to write on the struggles for independence and how to develop the country so that the people could reap the benefits of independence.

Musa later launched the Southeast Asian Literature Council (Mastera) website and a book titled "Orang di Jambatan" (People On The Bridge).

He also gave away prizes to winners of the Mastera 2001 Literary Works.

The Mastera panel picked a novel "Urih Pesisir" by Muslim Burmat from Brunei, "Mantra Pejinak Ular" by Kuntowijoyo of Indonesia and a literature review by Malaysia's Muhammad Haji Salleh as the prize-winning works.

Each of them received RM10,000, a plaque and certificate.

The literary prize is a form of initiative to provide regional recognition to quality literary works produced by writers in this region.

-- BERNAMA

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