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Mahathir-Literary

DR MAHATHIR WANTS LITERARY FIGURES TO PRESERVE NATIONAL RESILIENCE

KUALA LUMPUR, May 28 (Bernama) -- Literary figures must play a role in preserving national resilience and become propagators of modernisation and progress for the people as had been done by literary figures in the past, the Prime Minister said tonight.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad hoped the twin role could be continued by modern day literary figures, by combining pride in the traditional values and adopting an open mind on elements of modernisation.

"We can't be too obsessed with the desire to purely uphold resilience while closing our eyes to the reality and changes occurring around us," he said at the presentation of the Utusan Group's Literary Awards 2002, here tonight.

Dr Mahathir said literary figures should also not allow themselves to be swept by the flow of modernisation and negative external values while neglecting positive values which existed in the local culture.

He said literary figures must find a dynamic balance in efforts to play the twin roles.

"Literary figures in the past had preserved national resilience by strengthening the Malay language and literature although we are still not satisfied with the quality and progress of the Malay language and literature," Dr Mahathir said.

Their second role was also to participate in propagating modernisation, that is, to introduce modern values so that the Malays could adapt themselves to progress "although we are not satisfied with the progress we have achieved so far," he said.

He said the Malay literary figure Za'aba was also a nationalist during the struggle against the imperialists, besides Abdul Rahim Kajai, Harun Aminulrashid, Ishak Haji Muhammad or Pak Sako, Keris Mas and Usman Awang as well as others.

The prime minister also said that local literary figures and publishers must instil and promote reading habit, particularly works of quality, among the community.

He proposed that local literary figures also read foreign novels so that they could understand what was it that was interesting in the writings and approach of the writers.

Dr Mahathir said there were vast differences in the sales of English and Malay books as authors of English books could become millionaires merely from the royalty of the books they had written.

"But for the Malay books, not only do literature books of high quality face sales problem, normal books are also difficult to sell," he said.

All these problems were related to the lack of reading habit among the people, and under such circumstances it was difficult to imagine how literature in the national language would progress and grow to be at par with literary works at the international level, he said.

"It is good if the local literary figures were to ask themselves whether they are keen to read foreign books.

"My guess is that they are not keen and certainly many of them are not anxious to buy and read new books written by their colleagues," he said.

He also said that stories which carried advice or messages could no longer be accepted by readers presently because the readers now were educated and highly intellectual and considered themselves to be more knowledgeable than the writers.

The prime minister said one way of encouraging the reading habit was to hold reading sessions especially at the school level, not only to instil interest in reading but also to enhance the ability to communicate.

Dr Mahathir also urged non-Malay writers to produce more works in the Malay language because this could play an important role in enhancing understanding between the various races.

"Readers of Malay books should be exposed to the heart beat and the sufferings and achievements of the non-Malays as well," he added.

Meanwhile, young writer Mohd Faizal Musa, who writes under the pen-name of "Faisal Tehrani", won the first prize in the junior novel category in the Utusan Group's Literary Award 2002.

His novel, based on the history of Melaka, entitled "1515" bagged the RM6,000 prize-money and the scroll of honour.

The second prize of RM4,000 went to Zaid Akhtar for his novel, "Rona Bosphorus" while the third prize of RM3,000 went to Sri Rahayu Mohd Yusop for her novel, "Merdekakan Cinta Ratna".

-- BERNAMA

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