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Irish classics to help Malaysians with English

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - On the way to making Malaysians proficient in the English Language, assistance has come from Ireland, home to some of the world's best English writers.

The National Library of Malaysia (NLM) today received 150 books by leading Irish authors, the likes of W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and Sean O'Casey from the republic's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen, T.D.

Cowen said after meeting Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, he saw the great emphasis placed on English by the Malaysian Government for the country's economic development.

He said Ireland shared a similar situation to Malaysia having received English as a second language, then reverting to the country's own language while at the same time attempting to build on its proficiency in English.

"In this respect our writers have helped greatly by gaining international recognition for Ireland through their writings in English.

"Four of our writers have won the Nobel Prize for Literature in recent times," he said after visiting the library as part of his five-day visit to Malaysia from Jan 8.

The IMPAC Dublin International Literary Award, which is the richest for a single work, offers a 100,000 euros (RM350,000) prize for works in English or translated works, he said.

Cowen said Ireland had strong ties with Malaysia and was willing to offer its help to develop English proficiency in Malaysia. Over 1,000 Malaysians were studying in Ireland.

Library director-general Datuk Zawiyah Baba, said the good relationship between Malaysia and Ireland was reflected in the National Library's close ties with the Embassy of Ireland.

"The embassy under the leadership of Daniel Mulhall has helped with book donations, participation by the ambassador in library programmes and by inviting us to participate in the Dublin international literary award.

"We are currently working on the Malaysian nominations to be sent for the award in 2004 together with IMPAC (M) Sdn Bhd."

Zawiyah said the library was also keen to work with Ireland's Chester Beatty Library in the matter of acquiring copies of Malay manuscripts kept there.

She said in view of the Government's emphasis on enriching English usage, especially the call for civil servants to read English novels, the library was strengthening its English fiction collection.

"This collection of classics and award winning novels, works by well-known authors and best sellers will be on loan to all government department libraries through the bulk loan scheme.

"We have identified 150 titles (1,490 copies) to be acquired for RM200,000 this year.

"These 150 books by Irish writers we have received today will definitely be a useful addition to our collection."