

Library dispels the fiction

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FICTION may be the choice for many Malaysians, but statistics from the National Library of Malaysia (NLM) show that non-fiction has a higher readership.

A total of 574,583 (55.5 per cent) non-fiction books were borrowed from NLM last year compared with 451,056 (43.6 per cent) fiction books that were checked out during the same period.

As for biographies, the total number of books borrowed was 8,878 or 0.9 per cent, with Nelson Mandela's biography checked out 70 times and books on Winston Churchill 91 times.

Mohamad Zaki Yusof of NLM library research department said from a list of more than 100 topics, the top four non-fiction topics preferred by the NLM users were home and family management, management and public relations, languages and drawing and decorative arts.

At present, NLM has 1,009,978 members, with 601,659 of them (59.6 per cent) youths from 15 to 40 years old.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak in his blog on Monday said that one's aspirations could be fuelled by reading about icons like former South African president Mandela, former British prime minister Churchill, best-selling author/journalist Malcolm Gladwell and business strategists such as W. Chan Kim and Reneé Mauborgne.

He also indicated his hope that Malaysians would read as often as possible.

NLM corporate planning and policy division deputy director Chin Loy Jyoon said the library had also appointed Malaysia's first astronaut Datuk Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor and Ipoh-born actress Datuk Michelle Yeoh as reading icons, while Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad was expected to be appointed on April 19.

Besides these icons, NLM has also been organising other programmes to encourage the reading habit, such as setting up book corners in KTM trains to Ipoh and Butterworth and reading campaign weeks in rural areas.

World Youth Foundation chief operations officer Varsha Ajmeera said her team encouraged youths (aged 18 to 25) to read up on world affairs through newspapers as they were an inexpensive source of information.

"We also tell them to read books on culture and economy."

Varsha said she had also advised youths to read about icons such as United States President Barack Obama and Mandela.

"In voluntary work, you must be passionate about what you're doing," she said, adding that reading about those who inspired people to do work and make global movements would inspire enthusiasm.

Adrian Lai Sher Wynn, 23, said he had stopped reading fiction as he felt it had not benefited him on an intellectual level.

"Reading autobiographies are useful; you learn from mistakes while preparing yourself for the future."

Some of his favourites were Obama's War, Catherine the Great and Mao Zedong.

Sunil Parmar, 23, reads mostly entrepreneurial and business-related books.

He cited Tony Fernandes, Richard Branson, Eike Batista, Warren Buffett and Steve Jobs as motivational in broadening horizons and gaining insight into others' viewpoints.

Matt La Brooy, 25, reads mostly fiction and script-writing books to get inspiration for his job as a visual effects artist.

Although he is interested in reading books about iconic people, such as Dr Mahathir, Jobs and Margaret Thatcher, he has not been able to find the time.

"It's interesting to know their thoughts, what drove them and what turned them into leaders," Matt said, adding that although he was interested in biographies, he did not spend much of his time on them.

Chittesh Shukla, 19, is an avid reader about artists, poets and performance artists including pop art icons like Andy Warhol and Leigh Bowery.

His choices are based on icons which match his own aspirations and motivations.

"I don't think that icons should be restricted to world peace activists or political figures alone," he said, adding that many teenagers were apolitical, with their icons consisting of celebrities.

Adzim Shahabudin, 24, said he did not relate to some of the leaders whose biographies he had read.

The last biographies he read was Tan Chin Nam's memoirs Never Say I Assume and Ooi Kee Beng's The Reluctant Politician: Tun Dr Ismail and His Time.

"It (The Reluctant Politician) was well-written and I was really curious about Tun Dr Ismail who had contributed tremendously to the country."

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