

## **Making Reading Part Of Malaysian Culture**

**Bernama**

**April 16, 2012**

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KUALA LUMPUR, April 16 (Bernama) -- In past years, the National Library measures reading habits of Malaysians through statistics and subjective measurements.

Importantly, it found that while citizens read an average of only two books a year in 1996, individual Malaysians were reading 12 books annually by 2010.

This is a reason why officials believe that reading habits have improved among Malaysians.

Another improvement worth considering is the increasing number of new registrations at the National Library.

For instance, there were 78,272 new registrations at the National Library last year, an increase of 38.1 per cent from the 56,676 members in 2010.

### **MORE READING NOW**

Meanwhile, 1,034,507 books were borrowed from the National Library in 2011, compared with 776,347 in the year prior.

The library's Information and Knowledge Infrastructure Director Salbiah Mohd Yusof noted that further supporting the increase in membership were requests for reading materials in the market.

She said in 2010, 15,767 reading materials were submitted under the Deposit of Library Material Act 1986.

Last year, the figure increased to 17,923 titles a year.

"The publishing industry will continue to flourish, as long as there is demand for printed materials," she said.

She said the improvement in reading habits could also be measured by observing the general public.

For example, Malaysians can today be found reading, any time and place, including in public locations.

"People read while waiting to board airplanes, buses, the LRT and trains, while waiting for their turn at the clinic or waiting for customers during business hours," Salbiah noted.

She said these were intangible observations that showed the nation's reading habits had improved.

### **CHANGES IN READING TRENDS**

Reading trends have indeed changed, especially among Generation Y, who are more exposed to sophisticated technologies and smart gadget applications that assist in reading.

The reading trend has also affected the National Library, which saw its numbers of visitors dwindling.

Salbiah said statistics revealed that visitors declined from 464,317 in 2010 to 416,672 last year.

Conversely, the number of people using the library's online services escalated from 6.44 million in 2010 to 8.26 million last year, a boost of 28.3 per cent.

Further, officials at the National Library view the advent of iPads and smartphones to access reading materials online as favourable to the country's reading culture.

Salbiah said with such resources at their fingertips, Malaysians could no longer hide behind the excuse of 'not having the time' to read.

## **EMPOWERING READING PROGRAMMES**

In a bid to boost reading programmes, the National Library has outlined several approaches that are hoped to expand the reading culture in Malaysia.

Salbiah said through the 1Malaysia approach, 36 programmes have been planned under 'Program Galakan Membaca 2012' (the 2012 reading encouragement programme). This is to support the 1Malaysia concept and the Blue Ocean Strategy.

She said the library would mobilise the programme by launching it in rural areas through the 1Malaysia Reading Encouragement Carnival, which involves five village libraries nationwide. Other programmes include 'Program Mari Membaca 1Malaysia : Kembara Ilmu Pewaris Negara' and 'Mari Membaca 1Malaysia Bersama Persatuan Pencinta Buku'.

Another planned programme is 'Kembara Jalur Lebar', a joint effort with MSD Digital Sdn Bhd, which will be held at six locations.

To raise awareness among Indians of the importance of reading, the 'Mari Membaca 1Malaysia : Ore Malaysia Vaasikka Vaarunggal' programme will be held with the help of the Malaysian Tamil Writers Association. The programme will also give recognition to Tamil writers and literary works.

Salbiah said the National Library would continue to promote reading among Malaysians with the help of the mass media, through information literacy programmes, by supporting the publishing of reading materials and continuing efforts of inculcating reading habits among the younger generation.

## **THE WORK CONTINUES**

However, Salbiah said the public should not view the National Library as an institution that should be shouldering the responsibility for instilling the habit of reading among Malaysians.

The library's role is more to provide a complete infrastructure and organising reading campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of reading.

Salbiah said the key to a country's growth, among others, is having citizens who love to read.

She noted that Malaysians are well aware of the importance of reading, but more effort needs to be put forth to promote reading so it becomes part of the culture among the people.

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Source: <http://www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/newsfeatures.php?id=659415>