

**Rural Religious Schools Still Relevant Today – Najib  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 8 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the institution of rural religious schools (pondok schools) is still relevant now as its existence reflected the continued preservation of an ancient Islamic-Malay identity in the region.

"It functions to preserve the values and livelihood system of the Malay-Muslims in the Nusantara region which uphold the teachings of the Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah (the Shafie sect in Islam)," he said.

Launching the Malaysian Pondok Development Foundation at the Taman Bukit Indah Mosque here Thursday, Najib pointed out that the rural religious institution system fulfilled the objectives of Islamic teachings on religion, humanity, economic development, education and peace.

"It (the institution) must be protected as knowledge channeled through religious school can be used and referred to address various attacks by academic and the post-modernism trend taking place now, he said.

Najib said in confronting the issue of absolute religious freedom, unlimited rationalism, secularism, liberalism and pluralism, the argument of the rural religious institution was more assuring.

According to him, many great books were taken from the texts of rural religious schools and were read by Western orientalist and enemies of Islam.

Therefore, he said, Islamic religious scholars and intellectuals should stand together to produce strong Islamic thinking and convincing arguments to face the enemy.

At the ceremony, Najib, who also is the patron of the foundation, announced a grant of RM100,000 to set up a resource centre at its headquarters.

He said the grant should be used to collect academic manuscripts and journals as well as publications or recording relating to the history of the rural religious institution, the scholars and their writings.

Najib also proposed to the foundation's management to give financial assistance or scholarships to excellent rural religious school students who faced financial problems in furthering their studies to institution of higher learning locally or abroad.

At the ceremony, Najib also presented Tokoh Pondok 2012 awards to three leading figures of the institution.

They were Mohd Zain Abu Bakar, director of Pondok Darul Hanan Lambor, Wakaf Bharu, Tumpat, Kelantan; Ahmad Shazali Ahmed Fauzi, director of Pondok Fauzi, Kampung Yan Kechil, Yan, Kedah and Sobri Othman, director of Madrasah al-Ulum ad-Diniah al-Ushmaniah or better known as Pondok Tanjung Kapor in Jitra, Kedah.

Najib also presented the 2012 Model Pondok awards to Kedah Islamic Studies College or Pondok Hutan Palas, Kedah, Darul Hanan Foundation, Pondok Tok Selehor, Palekbang,

Tumpat, Kelantan and Madrasah Miftahul Muarif, Muar, Johor as well as launching a pondok directory which listed 110 pondoks in the country.

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