Library dispels the fiction

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 (85.5 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 Zakaria 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 601,669 of them (59.6 per cent) youths from 18 to 40 years old.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said in his blog on Monday 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 Renee 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 organizing 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 Ajmeera World Youth Foundation COO.

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