Conservation Division of National Library holds manuscript restoration demo

By NOR AIN HASSAN
norain@newsabahtimes.com.my

KOTA KINABALU: For the first time, a team from the Conservation Division of the National Library held a manuscript restoration demonstration at the Sabah State Library yesterday.

The Conservation and Reprography Unit of the National Library is responsible for protecting, conserving and capturing library materials through a systematic conservation programme.

Director of the Sabah State Library, Wong Vui Yin, said the ongoing Rare Collections Exhibition here enables people in Kota Kinabalu to see what is available at the National Library.

The exhibition will be in Kota Kinabalu for two months starting yesterday.

"It gives the opportunity to see the growth of the collections in the National Library. You can see during this exhibition, that some Malay manuscripts are handwritten not only on paper but also on animal skin, wood, bamboo and stones.

"This is literally the heritage of the country. We have to preserve all these historical artifacts so that we can trace back the historical development of the country," said Wong.

He was speaking to the New Sabah Times during the exhibition at the Sabah State Library here yesterday.

"If you do not preserve it now then the next generation will never know and not be able to see what we have," he said when speaking of efforts to restore and preserve rare collections and manuscripts in their original format for future generations.

He praised the efforts of the National Library in ensuring that all rare materials are conserved and made available digitally.

"Some materials are very fragile, not conducive for people to handle. But once digitised, it can be made available online. This will be a fantastic opportunity for people to see the beauty of manuscripts.

"The manuscripts are handwritten and beautifully illustrated. Now we have modern technology but it is not as beautiful as what is written in the manuscripts. This is an art form which we should introduce to the next generation. It should be preserved so that our children will appreciate and introduce something like this," he added.

Meanwhile, Assistant Conservator of the National Library's Conservation Unit, Mohd Firdaus Mat Dua said that restoration work is very meticulous and require special and imported equipment mostly from Japan.

"In Malaysia, there are only 70 specialists who do the conservation work. This job requires patience and focus as it involve so many processes and techniques," said Mohd Firdaus.

He said every material has its own personal uniqueness and should be well taken care of to preserve its physical nature and original contents.

The manuscripts are handwritten documents in Jawi script which surfaced in the early sixteenth century till the twentieth century. It covers a wide range of subjects from literature, history, religious Islamic teachings, medicine and court customs.

Other rare collections are publications that were published locally or overseas before 1900 and no longer available in the market. It comprises various kinds of subjects such as history, culture, agriculture and more.

"When we receive the material, it is completely our responsibility to ensure their safety. After the ink fading test, we need to decide whether to use the tissue repair method or leafcasting repair.

"These materials offer an abundance of history and knowledge. It is our invaluable documented heritage of the past which must be preserved for future generations," he said.

Also present was the Assistant Director of the Malaysian Service Centre at the National Library, Yazid Ibrahim.