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PM praises imam, village heads for exemplary role

APPRECIATION: Fully-sponsored pilgrimage for 400 imam and village heads nationwide

SEAN AUGUSTIN

THE prime minister said it was only fitting that imam and village heads had their pilgrimage sponsored as the two groups played a significant role in local affairs.

In paying tribute to them, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said if imam and village heads continue to play their part persistently and responsibly, most of the community's needs would be attended to well.

Imam, he said, were always at the forefront of many religious events, like leading the prayers at mosques, during weddings and funerals, *hajjat* prayers and at *yassin* recitals.

Society meanwhile, placed a lot of hope on village heads in dealing with various issues, including land matters "no matter the season or time".

Najib said that it was only proper that a part of the wealth generated by the government be allocated for "good and noble" intentions.

"There is nothing better than

helping these groups perform the haj," he said before handing out 400 offer letters to selected imam, village heads, Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK) chairmen and Federal Village Development and Security Committees (JKKP) chairmen, here, yesterday.

Also present were Malaysia Development Board chairman Tan Sri Lodin Wok Kamaruddin and Lembaga Tabung Haji group managing director and chief executive officer Datuk Ismee Ismail.

Earlier in his speech, Najib said since he took over the administration he had always intended to

find a way to ensure all imam and village heads nationwide would be able to perform the haj.

Last year, he said, 111 individuals from the two groups participated in the inaugural programme.

Some of those who were selected last year, Najib explained, had as little as RM10 in their Tabung Haji

account, which he said was quite sad.

"The programme had a huge impact on the participants, who were very grateful," he said, adding that the rise in the number of participants this year was due to the increase in the nation's wealth.

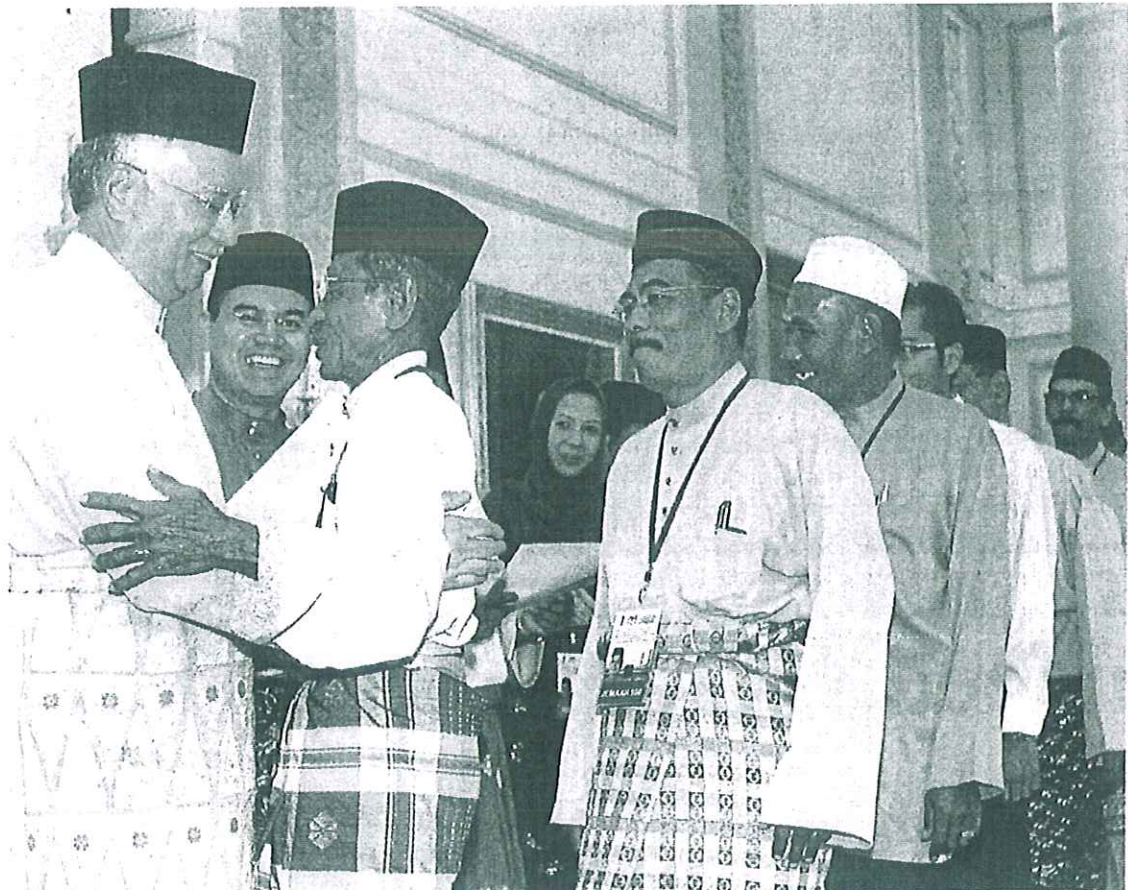
Najib also praised Lembaga Tabung Haji for its efficiency in managing the haj trips, which he said was among the best in the world with many countries looking at Malaysia as a role model.

Jalaluddin Mat Jali, an imam from Shah Alam, said the programme meant a lot to his fellow imam and village heads as it was an opportunity that was not offered in other parts of the world.

"Maybe there are those here today who had planned to perform the haj this year but had their dreams dashed due to financial constraints. This programme made our dreams come true."

ESTABLISHED 1845
NEW STRAITS TIMES
INCORPORATING BUSINESS TIMES

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Datuk Seri Najib Razak being hugged by former Pekan village head Abdul Majid Mohamad, 63, after receiving the offer letter in Putrajaya yesterday for the sponsored pilgrimage. Pic by Fariz Iswadi Ismail