

Malay Muslims have made great progress but must now aim higher: PM Lee

He lays out 3 focus areas for self-help group Mendaki, including early childhood support

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The Malay/Muslim community in Singapore has made great progress but must now aim higher and go further, said Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on Saturday.

He noted that the aspirations and needs of the community have grown, but a segment of the community still has difficulties, resulting in much work for self-help group Yayasan Mendaki to do.

Speaking at Mendaki's 40th anniversary celebration, PM Lee laid out three areas for the organisation to focus on – early childhood support, resolving family issues and social problems, and promoting lifelong education among workers.

Noting that these efforts would require resources, he announced that the Government will be supporting Mendaki's plans to raise \$40 million to improve existing programmes and implement new schemes.

It will match funds raised by Mendaki dollar for dollar, up to \$20 million, meaning that Mendaki has to raise only \$20 million by itself to reach its \$40 million target.

Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli, who is chairman of Mendaki, said he is very confident that the self-help group will be able to raise the \$20 million within a year because many small and medium-sized enterprises and local firms have already come forward to donate.

At least \$14 million has been raised through donations so far, and the process is ongoing.

PM Lee said Mendaki's mission to uplift the community through education remains relevant and important, but that in today's context, it has to interpret education more broadly.

"Mendaki needs to extend sup-



Dr Sharifah Mariam Aljunied (left) was given the Anugerah Sanjungan Budi (Distinguished Service Award) on Saturday for having contributed significantly to the Malay/Muslim community in education and lifelong learning for at least 20 years, while Ms Nur Aisyah Lyana Mohamed Satria received the Anugerah Gemilang (Pinnacle Award), which recognises positive impact on the lives of others and character, competence and citizenry. Mr Muhammad Asyraf Mohd Affandee received the Anugerah Belia Cemerlang (Youth Promise Award), which is awarded to students with potential in diverse fields beyond the traditional academic areas. PHOTOS: LIANHE ZAOBAO

port to begin earlier, in early childhood. It is critical that we give our children, especially those from disadvantaged families, a good start in life," he said.

It also needs to work with disadvantaged families to help resolve family issues and social problems, so that children from such families can grow up and learn under more supportive circumstances.

The organisation also needs to promote lifelong education among workers, to enable them to stay em-

ployable, take up new opportunities and thrive in a rapidly evolving economy, said PM Lee.

In his speech at the celebration at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) University Cultural Centre, PM Lee said that the landscape for the Malay/Muslim community has drastically improved over the years.

PM Lee noted that in the early 1980s, only about half of every Malay student cohort passed their O levels.

Today, though not everyone pursues the O-level track, 99 per cent of every Malay student cohort complete at least 10 years of education and over 90 per cent complete post-secondary studies.

Students from the community are also doing better in school, he



ENABLING A GOOD START

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PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG speaking at the Malay self-help group's 40th anniversary celebration on Saturday.

said, noting the large number of Mendaki awards given out on Saturday.

The awards are given out annually to Singaporean Muslim students who have done exceptionally well in national examinations, and the award ceremonies on Saturday and Sunday will see a total of 480 recipients.

On Saturday, Mendaki recognised three individuals who have contributed significantly to the Malay/Muslim community in education and lifelong learning for at least 20 years with a new award.

The recipients of the Anugerah Sanjungan Budi (Distinguished Service Award) are Mr Haider Mohamedally Sithawalla, Mr Sallim Abdul Kadir and Dr Sharifah Mariam Aljunied.

Mr Haider, 89, executive director of KSP Investments, was a

deputy chairman of Mendaki Holdings from 2003 to 2005, while Mr Sallim, 68, chairman of Industrial and Services Cooperative Society, has been a board member of Mendaki since 2004.

Dr Mariam, 56, an adjunct associate professor at the psychology department of NUS, helped to develop Tiga M, a numeracy and literacy programme for pre-school children.

Of the progress made by the community, she said what stood out most was that many activists and volunteers with Mendaki were once beneficiaries of its schemes.

"The hand that was at one point receiving, is now the hand that is giving. It speaks tremendously of the spirit of the community," said Dr Mariam.

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