

Envoys should be well versed in trade matters

MALAYSIA'S diplomats abroad have been advised to acquire in-depth knowledge and understanding of global trading operations and regulations in view of the country's increasing dependence on foreign trade for economic growth.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said diplomats abroad should also be well versed in issues such as non-tariff trade protectionist measures so that they can be debated and discussed during multilateral and bilateral negotiations.

He was speaking at the opening

of the conference of heads of Malaysian missions abroad in Petaling Jaya yesterday in conjunction with the launching of the Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations.

The Prime Minister pointed out that the task of looking after the nation's economic interests in international relations is more complex than seeking political friendship, where "friends and foes" are not easily distinguished. "A political friend may be an arch economic rival," he pointed out.

As the world trading system is also becoming more complex,

diplomats must understand the official and unofficial attitudes of other countries, he added.

Diplomats should also monitor closely the economic prospects resulting from democratic reforms in eastern Europe so that the Government can come up with appropriate strategies for the future.

Stressing that Malaysia is stepping up efforts to strengthen South-South cooperation, the Prime Minister said representation in South countries will be increased.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir expressed the hope that, with the standard courses offered by the Institute of Diplomacy and International Relations, a new breed of more efficient diplomats will be spawned.

This is because in an era of global inter-dependence, the role of diplomats in achieving the country's objectives and national policies has become more important. Hence, the need for efficiency and in-depth knowledge of diplomatic ways and national policies.

The institute offers training courses, which cover all fields of diplomacy, from culture to protocol, language and the art of negotiation, to prospective and serving officers.

The launching was also attended by Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid, Wisma Putra secretary-general Datuk Ahmad Kamil Jaafar and the institute's Director-General, Datuk A.S. Talalla.