

PM stresses need to know nation's

Stay attuned,

By Syed Nadzri

GENTING HIGHLANDS, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants Malaysian diplomats to be more attuned to the country's aspirations, its emergence as a major trading nation and its high-profile international role.

The Prime Minister said beside improving their proficiency in English and other languages so as to be able to communicate effectively, they must also be well-versed with Malaysia's economic policies and those of their host countries.

In the spirit of Malaysia Incorporated, they should be able to promote trade and render adequate assistance to Malaysians doing business abroad, he said at the opening of the six-day conference of heads of Malaysian missions abroad at the Awana Golf and Country Club Resort here.

The proficiency in languages, particularly English, is very important in diplomacy because without such mastery, the diplomats will not be able to communicate well in crucial missions such as treaty negotiations.

Dr Mahathir, who underscored this message in his address, also repeated it at a Press conference later.

The conference, which saw participation from about 70 members of the country's diplomatic corps, features talks and dialogues with key government officials.

Also present today were Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, his deputy Datuk Dr Abdullah Fadzil Che Wan, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid and Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Tan Sri Ahmad Kamil Jaafar.

Asked at the Press conference if the standard of English among diplomats was so low as to warrant such a reminder, Dr Mahathir said his concern was more for the new recruits.

"We are worried because some new recruits in the Foreign Service are not very proficient and seem to lack self-confidence," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was not enough for diplomats to be satisfied with the standard of English they had acquired at school or college.

"Obviously, we cannot draft a treaty with other countries using Bahasa Malaysia text... and in order to negotiate treaties, the language used must be precise.

"This is where the command of the language is important because if we use the wrong words, the result might be detrimental to our country," he added.

On his call for aid to Malaysian businessmen abroad, Dr Mahathir was asked if this was prompted

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by complaints from these businessmen about a lack of support from Malaysian missions.

"Not that there had been complaints but I was just stressing the areas where the diplomats need to render their assistance. And also to respond to inquiries from Malaysian businessmen venturing abroad because Malaysia's investments overseas are not just confined to Vietnam and China but are also in European countries," he said.

He said diplomats should realise the importance of the Malaysia Incorporated concept, which required the Government and the private sector to work closely.

He said Malaysia was becoming a major trading nation and this importance could be seen from the inclusion of big groups of businessmen in official government overseas delegations.

In stressing the need for diplomats to stay in tandem with the Government's international policies, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia now had a higher profile on the world front.

aspirations and international role

diplomats told