

Defend policies, envoys told

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KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian diplomats have been told to defend the country's free and independent foreign policies and play a more active role in dealing with Malaysian students abroad.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said while Malaysian missions had done a good job, more had to be implemented, especially in facing challenges of a globalised world.

"Our foreign policies have been free and unrestricted and we feel that we have the right to support or criticise where necessary as an independent country.

"The feedback that we get from our diplomats is that developing countries, including China, support and highly respect our role. But some countries are not exactly happy with us," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to the media after a three-hour dialogue session in Seri

Kembangan near here yesterday with some 70 Malaysian diplomats who are back for a conference of heads of missions.

On Malaysian students overseas, Dr Mahathir noted that while these students were under the Malaysian Students Department, diplomats should be taking a more active role to meet and explain the Government's policies to them.

"I think in future, ambassadors will be required to be in close contact with our students. We will concentrate on countries where we have many students.

"Of course our students are not an easy lot to deal with because other people come from Malaysia to instigate," he added.

He said instigations from certain quarters had often resulted in students developing anti-government sentiments.

Malaysia has a large number of students mainly in Australia, Britain, New Zea-

land, the United States and Egypt.

Later, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Dr Mahathir reminded the diplomats of the

challenges ahead and for them to be more active in voicing out Malaysia's foreign policies and approaches on regional and international issues.

"Our policies show that we are not bound to any country and the decisions we took were based on our interest as a developing country."