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Mahathir-Diplomat

DIPLOMATS SHOULD EXPLAIN GOVT POLICIES TO MALAYSIAN STUDENTS ABROAD

KUALA LUMPUR, May 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysian diplomats should assume a more active role in explaining government policies to Malaysian students abroad.

He said although the Malaysian Students Department (MSD) looked after student affairs, in future diplomats would be required to forge close contact with Malaysian students in countries where they were serving.

"In future, they are required to have close contact with students. Of course our students are not an easy lot to deal with because other people come from Malaysia to incite them," he told reporters after opening the Malaysian Heads of Mission Conference here today.

He said by and large Malaysian diplomats have done a good job in explaining government policies and also about the country's good relations with others.

Dr Mahathir said no other country had a special department just to look after the affairs and welfare of its students abroad except Malaysia.

He added despite the establishment of MSD and adequate staff to handle students' problems and welfare, Malaysian students tended to develop anti-government sentiment because of instigation by others.

Asked as to which country should be the focus of diplomats, the Prime Minister said the diplomats must seek out Malaysian students where ever they may be studying overseas.

Earlier, the Prime Minister held a three-and-a-half hour closed door dialogue with 68 ambassadors and high commissioners, 18 consuls-general and Malaysian diplomats.

Asked by reporters on what transpired during the dialogue, Dr Mahathir said he traced Malaysia's history of foreign policies since independence until today.

He added that when Malaysia was not very active in the international arena, its policies were more pro-West, but now the country's foreign policies were more open.

"Now, our foreign policies are open and we are of the opinion that we have the right to support or criticise whenever necessary as an independent nation," he said.

The Prime Minister said a majority of the ambassadors and high commissioners wanted to be informed of the country's foreign relations policy.

Of particular interest, he said was Malaysia's foreign policy with the new US administration, China and Russia.

On what other countries thought of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said generally developing countries including China supported and praised Malaysia's role in championing the rights of developing countries but the super powers were not happy with this.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Syed Hamid, who was also present at the conference, later told reporters that Dr Mahathir was satisfied with the role and duties carried out by Malaysian diplomats abroad.

However, he added that present challenges were more taxing than before and required diplomats to be more active in explaining government policies and Malaysia's approach in regional and international issues including to Malaysian students studying abroad.

Syed Hamid said Wisma Putra had issued a directive on the matter while the information sent out to diplomats overseas should be updated

continuously.

He said that during the meeting, Dr Mahathir explained the evolution of Malaysia's foreign policies and related matters that the ambassadors and high commissioners should be aware of in order to carry out their duties more efficiently.

The dialogue provided an opportunity for the diplomats to seek the Prime Minister's views on current issues and developments in countries where they served.

He also said Dr Mahathir reminded the diplomats of the borderless world, globalisation, liberal democracy and how Malaysia had to pursue policies which were not tied or depended on other countries but to formulate policies which looked after the nation's interest and that of developing countries.

Meanwhile, Syed Hamid said, "It is a very important message and it allows us to understand the policy issues covering all sort of areas.

"It is necessary for us to be able to defend the current position of the country, notwithstanding the fact that people may feel uncomfortable about what we have said, so long as it is in the name of international justice and in the name of being right," Syed Hamid added.

The five-day conference would also cover meetings with the key ministries like the Education, Finance, International Trade and Industry, Health, private sector and a visit to Putrajaya and Cyberjaya.

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