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Don't interfere, diplomats told

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KUALA KLANG, Fri. - The Government has the right to ask diplomats who meddle in the country's internal affairs and politics to leave.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim said diplomats who take part in activities that jeopardise the calm and tranquility of this country, should leave if requested by the Government.

"Many countries in the Caribbean, South America and China have resorted to this action but Malaysia, in keeping with its allegiance to the Geneva Convention, has so far taken the lenient approach.

"But if need be, the Government will not hesitate to take a harsh stand in this matter to serve as a warning to diplomats," Rais said after opening the Parent-Teacher Association meeting of Sekolah Rendah Undang Jelebu today.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad advised foreign Governments especially Asean members, not to interfere in Malaysia's domestic affairs.

He had asked the Governments to instead be sensitive to the feelings of Malaysians. Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on the presence of officials from some foreign embassies and high commissions at a briefing organised by Parti Keadilan Nasional on Sunday, apparently held to brief them on Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's state of health.

Representatives from the missions of Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Indonesia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Holland, the United States, Germany and New Zealand attended the briefing.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar had said the briefing had political connotations and was part of Keadilan's political struggle.

Rais said if it could be proven that the diplomats had, over a period of time, taken liberty to participate in some of the political activities or to physically or financially support the party, their actions could be construed as being security risks.

"Normally diplomats, especially those from Asean countries, are sensitive about such matters. For instance, our colleagues from Singapore would not come and attend a meeting of the DAP or Pas, because the Government in power is the Barisan Nasional.

"Neither would a political representative or diplomat from outside would go to Singapore, for instance, to attend a non-PAP function. We understand that this has never happened.

"But the fact that it has happened in Kuala Lumpur ... I must say this is a unique development."

Rais said the Government would like to send a strong signal to countries that overtly showed support for the Opposition, that their diplomats were staying in this country at the pleasure of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong. "Or they would very soon become persona non grata."

"Firstly, the diplomats cannot take part in the deliberations of the political parties so as to show active participation.

"If they come merely to listen to a speech, this is a different matter compared to a clandestine meeting or briefing.

"It is rather unfortunate that the diplomats concerned were not sensitive about this."

Rais said the diplomats should refrain from taking part in the meeting in the manner that had been reported.

"In this case, I believe they (the diplomats) do not have to be chased

out just like that. They should be quizzed why they were keen to be part of the dubious meeting.

"However, I must emphasise here it is not wrong for a diplomat to be invited to listen to a speech by any political party so long as he or she does not take an active part in it or show a prejudiced stand."

Rais also said it was not wrong for political parties to invite diplomats to attend their functions.

"However, if the invitation is aimed at winning sympathy or to seek outside assistance to create a rift within society or to cause the downfall of the Government, then this is wrong."