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Envoys told to play active role in explaining policies

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MALAYSIAN diplomats must be aggressive and active in explaining the Government's policies to students abroad so that the latter would not be easily influenced by the anti-government groups, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Citing the high number of Malaysian students abroad, Dr Mahathir said this warrants the ambassadors and diplomats to play an active role and require close contacts with the students so that they are better informed of the Government's policies.

"Students are not easy to be dealt with and they are prone to be influenced by those who come to instigate them to become anti-government," he said after opening the Conference of Heads of Malaysian Mission Overseas in Serdang yesterday.

Malaysia's high commissioners, ambassadors, charge d'affairs, consul generals, consuls and heads of liaison office who serve Malaysia abroad attended the conference.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, his deputy Datuk Dr Leo Michael Toyad and the ministry's Secretary-General Datuk Abdul Kadir Mohamad were also present.

Dr Mahathir said serious attention should be given to the welfare of students, providing the example of the UK where the High Commissioner played an active role.

Likewise, he said Malaysia was the only country in the world which has its own Malaysian Students Department (MSD) with large staff to look after the welfare of its students.

"Wherever there are Malaysian students, our ambassadors must be in close contact with them to explain (the Government's policies)," Dr Mahathir said.

In conjunction with the conference, Dr Mahathir also had a closed-door dialogue with conference delegates to iron out various issues.

"By and large, they have done their jobs very well in which they have managed to explain and defend our position and at the same time carry out our policies.

"Each country has its own policies pertaining to say United Nations, the Government's general policies and bilateral relations with other countries," Dr Mahathir said.

"Malaysia is a free country. Thus it can have its own policies and have the right to support and criticise, wherever needed, as a free nation. We are not tied to any parties," Dr Mahathir said.

He said Malaysia received the support of developed nations even though there were times when its policies differed from the big nations.

Meanwhile, Syed Hamid said the Prime Minister was satisfied with the roles and duties played by the ambassadors, especially with the greater challenges faced by them now compared with in the past.

"Ambassadors have to play an active role in explaining Malaysia's policies and stand in regional and international issues to everybody, including students," Syed Hamid said.

Syed Hamid said ambassadors were informed and instructed to closely interact with students and provide them with latest information on various issues.

"Through these efforts and a continuous approach, we can help to develop better understanding of our policies among the students," he said.

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