

# Challenging role for IDFR in training of diplomats

IF A SHOPKEEPER takes a lot of pain to dress his window to promote his shop, think of how much an ambassador has to do to project his country.

Quite a lot if the ambassador happens to be someone who believes that an embassy is the front window of his country.

One such person is the former Malaysian Ambassador to the US, Datuk Albert S. Talalla, who upon his retirement last year was appointed to head the country's Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR).

As the institute's director-general since its inception one year ago, he has helped in no small measure to that sense of pride in the younger generation of diplomats through its programmes.

Under his guidance, IDFR, a brain-child of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has grown by leaps and bounds in terms of capability and success.

In an interview at his office to mark the institute's first anniversary, Talalla said IDFR was set up to train officers involved in foreign relations work apart from honing their skills and knowledge.

Talalla said diplomats need to be trained in order to become more specialised as the demand on Malaysian diplomats today and in the future is greater because international relations has become more complex in every aspect.

In order to ensure that the objective was reached, IDFR took advantage of the abundant experience of serving and former ambassadors to help formulate its syllabus and programmes.

He also consulted a lot of local and foreign experts to get their advice on the relevancy of the syllabus apart from taking a look at other foreign service institutes abroad.

This arrangement was a far cry from the old style of training diplomats on the job and supplementing it with courses conducted by the National Institute of Public Administration's (Intan) Centre of Diplomacy.

The institute has so far conducted 19 training courses attended by more than 300 local and foreign participants with 10 of the course specifically tailored for serving diplomats.

The institute opens its door not only to local government and private sector organisations involved in international relations but also participants from neighbouring and developing countries under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme and the auspices of Asean.

Among the areas covered are diplomatic practice, international relations, strategic and security studies, international negotiations and international trade and economic relations.

Under the diplomatic practice programme, a pre-

posting training is given to diplomats and their spouses to ensure that they are prepared to play their supportive role to the fullest while abroad.

Apart from conducting courses for junior diplomats, it also conducts refresher programmes for senior officials of ambassadorial rank to keep them abreast with new government policies and plans.

The programme conducted by foreign experts also serves to assist them to enhance their skills in two important areas — negotiating and how to conduct themselves with the media.

IDFR also gives special emphasis on creating better rapport among future diplomats in the region by organising an eight-week foreign service course for 25 junior Asean diplomats sponsored by the Asean secretariat.

Among the highlights of the course were talks given by former Foreign Minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie, visits to Jakarta and Bandung in Indonesia for a first hand look at the activities of a member country and a one-week attachment with their respective embassies here to expose them to all aspects of professional working at the mission.

Meanwhile, in line with the country's current foreign policy of paying more attention to economy and trade, the institute has so far conducted two such courses on the fundamentals of global international economic relations and trade investment promotions.

IDFR is preparing two four-month courses at the end of the year for new local recruits and the other on specialised subjects involving foreign participants.

"IDFR tries its best to get the most suitable people to give lectures to course participants by engaging the services of former ambassadors and local and foreign experts, including Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (Mida) chairman Tan Sri Zainal Abidin Sulong, who was formerly Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry."

Apart from long-term programmes, IDFR also conducts half-day talks by visiting dignitaries and one such programme involved the British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd recently.

On his plans for the future, Talalla said he is developing the library expected to be fully operational by early next year.

Plans are also under way to set a research division and a language centre which will offer basic level French, Spanish and Arabic apart from enhancing the proficiency of the English language.

The future certainly looks bright for the institute and if Talalla has his way, all graduates of IDFR will be a well-rounded diplomat "with a keen intellect, inquisitive mind, outgoing and sociable". — Bernama