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## **School for world's diplomats**

By TEH ENG HOCK

KUALA LUMPUR: If training government officers to excel in diplomatic service is tough, imagine what it would be like to fine-tune full-fledged foreign ambassadors to be at the top of the game.

Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) executive chairman Tan Sri Hasmy Agam knows what it takes to be a top diplomat, having served in various postings all over the world including Malaysia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Representatives from more than 135 countries had been trained, or had trained others, through courses, workshops and seminars on diplomacy and international relations at IDFR.

Last year, ambassadors from Bosnia Herzegovina and Palestine attended courses at IDFR, while the year before, the institute played host to ambassadors from Iraq, Afghanistan and Timor Leste.

When Hasmy took over the IDFR in April 2007, one of his first responsibilities was to revamp the diplomatic training system by making the scope more in depth to produce multi-tasking diplomats with a global overview.

The institute is not all that new, with an alumni of about 8,000 serving in embassies and foreign missions around the world since its inception in 1991.

Housed in Wisma Putra's former headquarters here, the institute resembles a nice getaway resort complete with a 60-room hostel.

Also incorporated into the 8.5ha land is the Treaty Room, where actual treaties were signed when the building housed the Foreign Ministry.

"The Prime Minister (Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi) gets nostalgic about this place, especially the Treaty Room, as he spent many years here as Foreign Minister," said Hasmy.

The institute moved to its current location in Jalan Wisma Putra after sharing its premises with the National Public Administration Institute (Intan) for 15 years.

It was officially launched on Jan 8 this year by Abdullah.

During its inception on July 1, 1991, the IDFR was placed under the Prime Minister's Department before it was placed under the purview of the Foreign Ministry in 2004.

“Back then, three quarters of the participants were foreign diplomats. When our leaders go abroad, they got requests from their foreign counterparts to train their diplomats. So we started opening our doors,” he added.

Former world leaders who had given lectures at IDFR include South African president Nelson Mandela, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.