

# 'Engage with Malaysians overseas'

**DISSEMINATING KNOWLEDGE:** Diplomatic missions must forge ties with Malaysian diaspora, says Muhyiddin

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**M**ALAYSIAN diplomatic missions overseas must regularly engage and establish contact with the Malaysian diaspora to promote mutual benefit between Malaysia and their host countries.

Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said there were about one million Malaysians living abroad. Malaysia has diplomatic missions in 105 countries.

He said developing regular contact with the Malaysian diaspora could assist envoys in carrying out their responsibilities more effectively in their host countries.

The Malaysian diaspora could also help promote Malaysia internationally by keeping an open communication channel through social media, for example, he said.

"They can help explain events or incidents taking place in Malaysia. Our country has done well to make itself known worldwide, but there are still many who do not know about us," said Muhyiddin in a speech at the 8th Heads of Mission Conference at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations yesterday.

The conference was aimed at ensuring Malaysian foreign policy was in line with new developments as well as highlighting issues and strategic interests to keep foreign missions abreast of the nation's developments.

Muhyiddin reiterated that ambassadors, diplomats, high commissioners and consular-generals should continue to project a positive image of the country at all

times and communicate their positions on various issues effectively.

He described Malaysian diplomatic missions as frontline representatives of the government, with an important role to form and influence public opinion about the country.

Muhyiddin related the impact of social media in the run-up to the 13th General Election, which he said had shaped public opinion, particularly among the youths.

"Some argued that it was a step towards a more open form of democracy but experience has taught us that social media can be abused.

"Rumours and accusations can spread like wildfire, including among the Malaysian community living abroad.

"We have to explain to Malaysians and foreigners alike that this is not what democracy is all about. It is also about the citizens' right to vote, the guarantee of the rule of law and accountable governance.

"I would like to reiterate the crucial role you have in projecting a positive image of Malaysia abroad, and to instil confidence in Malaysia's continued stability and sound governance among the international community."

"The fact that people are able to use social media freely, albeit within the ambit of our laws, is an indication of a robust democracy."

Improved engagement with Malaysians living abroad could also help to reverse the brain drain, where talents leave their home countries for better opportunities in developed nations, that had affected many countries.

Muhyiddin also called for work-



Deputy Prime Minister **Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin** (seated fifth from left) with Foreign Minister **Datuk Seri Anifah Aman** (seated fourth from left) and Deputy Foreign Minister **Datuk Hamzah Zainuddin** (seated sixth from left) with the heads of foreign missions in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Pic by Azmaidi Abidin

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ing synergy between Malaysian diplomatic missions and Talent Corp, which was set up to provide incentives to attract Malaysian experts to return home to work.

"Malaysian diplomatic missions and Talent Corp should harness each others' strengths to reach out to Malaysians abroad and raise awareness about the opportunities back home.

"Talent Corp will be able to provide information on the type of experts Malaysia needs while our diplomatic missions can assist in disseminating (related) informa-

tion among other Malaysians in their host country."

Also present was Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Hamzah Zainuddin.