

THE MAKING OF A DIPLOMAT

We can generally agree that we reap what we sow. I have been a trainer of our diplomats at different times since I joined the Foreign Ministry in 1970.

I have got myself fully involved in matters of diplomacy and training of diplomats both inside and outside at the Foreign Ministry, working with the administrative head at Wisma Putra then — now known as the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR) — Mon Jamaluddin and his Deputy, Zainal Mokhtar, in the early 70s.

In those days, we were only trained on the job. IDFR only came about in 1991, and some form of diplomatic training became a must for every diplomat before they set out for their posts overseas.

Once at their post, officers were put on the job almost right away. One of three things could happen:

IF they have been posted abroad to take over from someone, they would have to learn from the beginning what needs to be done;

IF they have to open a mission in the capital city of a country, they would have to work very much alone with help from colleagues in the finance and management sections of the ministry or at the post; and,

IF they have been asked to report to the mission as head of mission with the rank of ambassador or ad interim ambassador, a lot of help and assistance would be given by the ministry



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before proceeding to assume the post.

I have gone through all three experiences that have taken me up the ranks of a diplomat until 1994.

Thinking back, there was very little pre-posting training given to officers before they arrived at their posts other than briefings by the administration section, seniors and colleagues in the ministry.

I recall my posting to Phnom

Penh, Cambodia. I was called in by the administration to take French lessons at the Alliance Francaise Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

Little did I know that I was to be sent to Phnom Penh to set up the Malaysian embassy there.

Since the inception of the IDFR at the Foreign Ministry, the training of our diplomats has become more focused, and mainly directed at rais-

ing diplomatic skills to meet requirements of today's diplomacy covering operational and functional areas and demands.

At the same time, other areas of skills-upgrading were not forgotten to bring our diplomats on a par with their foreign colleagues. These include the growing and newer areas of diplomacy, such as defence and security, economic, public, cultural and cybersecurity.

Of note, our diplomats were also encouraged to pursue further studies at the masters and doctorate levels on a joint-basis with local universities.

Under the auspices of the government's Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP), our diplomats joined their counterparts from developing countries in Africa, West Asia, the Indian sub-continent, the Pacific Islands and from Asean countries to benefit from networking opportunities, knowledge-sharing and skills-updating in such programmes as Strategic Analysis, Futures Studies and Scenario Planning, and Nation Branding.

Looking back at the country's 65 years of history, Malaysians have much to celebrate over the roles played, honours earned and achievements attained by our diplomats, all for the love of the king, country and diplomacy.

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