

## Mixed reactions to announcement on cultural attachés

By **Azdee Amir** - October 5, 2022 @ 2:42pm



The recent announcement by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah on the appointment of language and cultural attachés at 10 foreign missions drew mixed reactions from both scholars and social activists.- NSTP/MOHD FADLI HAMZAH

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The recent announcement by Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah on the appointment of language and cultural attachés at 10 foreign missions drew mixed reactions from both scholars and social activists.

Saifuddin, who spoke about the matter at the 25th anniversary of the Malaysia Club Deutschland gala dinner in Frankfurt, Germany, said the move was in line with the government's focus on language and cultural diplomacy post-pandemic.

Malaysian National Writers Association president Dr Mohamad Saleeh Rahamad said this was a very welcome development and further efforts should be made to extend the use of the language to other shores.

"For me, this is a positive development which is very good and somewhat of a success for those of us from the Malaysian National Writers Association.

"We have always supported such a proposal, be it in a resolution or as a memorandum to the ministers, the cabinet and especially the deputy prime minister and prime minister.

"By having language and cultural attachés, similar to what Indonesian embassies have had for quite some time now, many matters related to language, linguistics and arts can be further expanded and popularised outside of Malaysia in key foreign countries around the world.

"I believe such a move is necessary for Malaysia to be better known on the international front in a more positive manner and light. But this effort must be executed properly and carefully with the right support and promotion.

"We hope this initiative will not be postponed or put on the back burner. More importantly, officers who will be entrusted with the role must be capable and right for the job in terms of knowledge, experience and commitment."

He said Malay language, linguistics and arts were very important commodities that could enhance the country's image and identity around the world in the future.

Universiti Utara Malaysia political analyst Professor Dr Mohd Azizuddin Sani agreed with Saifuddin's announcement.

He said the appointment of language and cultural attachés would bode well with efforts to promote Malaysia to a wider global audience.

"Those who are appointed will have a very important role to play, especially in integrating and extending the use of Bahasa Malaysia for official functions and matters as an example, not just for translation.

"Our mother tongue can have a stronger and more impactful role not only in promoting better bilateral relations, but also in forging stronger ties and as a medium of cultural exchange.

"This is a platform for the language to have a more important, wider role on the international front.

"Those who are appointed to such roles have a very important job on their hands, so they must have the necessary linguistic skills, experience and know-how.

"On the international front, many know of Bahasa Indonesia, so it is time Bahasa Malaysia gets more exposure and increased use among a wider audience, which will hopefully promote the country's image and appeal."

Social activist Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye had a different take on the matter.

"As a proud Malaysian, I totally support any effort to further spread the use and heighten the importance of Bahasa Malaysia as our beloved national language beyond Malaysian shores. I speak our language daily and I love it.

"By promoting the use of Bahasa Malaysia in other countries, it is a commendable effort to promote the country through the beauty of the language for tourism and beyond.

"However, I feel this is not the right time to do so.

"The country has many urgent, pressing matters that need to be seen to and addressed, such as the need to attract more foreign investments, boost the national economy, which will galvanise local economies and industries that will in turn provide for more jobs for the rakyat.

"Malaysian foreign missions can aid in such matters by organising trade fairs and missions or carrying out bilateral trade talks, which can help attract foreign investments to the country.

"This will help the country's recovery as the nation has been through a lot in the past three years.

"So I feel it's just not the right time for such an effort. The priority should be on revitalising the economy and creating more jobs."

On Sunday, Saifuddin said the first attaché posting would be in Germany, followed by postings in nine other countries.

He said the appointed officers would organise Malay language classes, as well as a series of discussions and talks by academicians from Malaysia.

He said the language and cultural diplomacy programme needed language and cultural attachés who would be appointed from officers from the relevant ministries, such as the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry and Higher Education Ministry.