

Don't cause disruption

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today criticised newly-formed pressure groups which not only challenged authorities but arrogated to themselves powers that are not legitimately theirs.

Stating that the disruptive capacity of these pressure groups was "quite considerable," the Prime Minister said:

"The reaction of the legitimate authorities to the disruptive challenges to their authority is either to become progressively repressive or to retreat

from their responsibility.

"The latter will result in anarchy, which in turn will attract forces keen on a seizure of power. Once this happens the usurper will discard democracy and resort to repression in order to stay in power.

"Either way, disruptive challenges to

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authority in a democracy will lead to repression and the death of democracy."

Dr Mahathir, opening the Eighth Malaysian Law Conference, said if a democracy were to survive, the limits

of the freedoms granted should be observed judiciously.

"The division and the balance of power between the legislative, executive and judiciary must be observed.

"Free speech and a free Press do not mean unlimited licence. Minorities, too, do not have unlimited rights. Pressure groups must know when to stop."

He warned that if democracy was destroyed, its restoration would be very costly for society and it might never be fully restored.

Dr Mahathir, who was addressing a gathering consisting predominantly of Supreme and High Court judges and lawyers, also spoke of a current trend to obtain last minute injunctions from the courts "calculated to frustrate

He contended that lawyers were professional men and the implication was that they were highly skilled, had a strong sense of social responsibility and an exceptional commitment to the interests of their clients.

Crime

"If ordinary members of society truly cannot understand the practices of professionals, then perhaps the professionals themselves should set the standards that will serve and measure up to the public interest," he said.

Professionals regulate themselves with two objectives — to ensure that all is well within the profession and that the profession does advance the public interest.

Dr Mahathir said that in general, Malaysian professionals had not quite succeeded in maintaining the high standards expected of them.

Stressing the importance of honesty and trustworthiness in professionalism, Dr Mahathir said short-changing a client was a form of dishonesty — a moral if not a legal crime — and the penalty for dishonest lawyers should be more

legitimate acts".

He said the provision for injunctions existed in law to prevent an irretrievable injustice and not to frustrate the law or to frustrate what was right and legal.

"On a technicality, individuals have been able to hold to ransom huge organisations with members numbering hundreds of thousands or even a million.

"And the ransom has to be paid. This of course prompts others to try the same. In the final analysis, this application of a right results in injustice to a great number of unsuspecting victims. Is this what the law is meant to do?

"The provision for injunctions is right and necessary but like all laws it is not to be abused. To do so would put the law into disrepute and the price to pay for that is horrendous."

On professionalism, exploitation and honesty, the Prime Minister suggested a public conference on the quality of legal service provided by Malaysian lawyers or questions related to their competence.