

# Undo damage first, PM tells Bar Council

By WONG CHUN WAI

PETALING JAYA: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the Bar Council must "undo the damage it has done in discrediting Malaysia" before he is prepared to meet it.

The Prime Minister said the council must "admit its responsibility for tarnishing the country's image."

He said the actions of the council had resulted in some investors losing confidence in Malaysia.

"Indirectly, they (council) have sabotaged the country's economy," he told newsmen at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport on his return from London after visiting Tanzania and attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Dr Mahathir said he was prepared to meet the council but it had continued spreading lies about the state of the Malaysian judiciary in several countries, including the United States, Britain and Australia.

The Prime Minister was responding to a recent statement by Malaysian Bar Council president Mnjjeet Singh Dhillon recently that the council would seek a meeting with the Prime Minister to clear the "gross misunderstanding" about its

role in society.  
Dr Mahathir said he had received a letter from the American Bar Association containing "all kinds of articles" which originated from the council.

He said he did not know whether the council was a political body or one set up to protect the honour of the legal profession.

On talks of an alternative Bar Council, he said that in other countries the governments had a role in such councils.

"Even in the medical council, the Government plays a role.

"This (Malaysian) Bar Council is like an anti-government body as if the Government has no rights at all."

He urged the council to improve the image of lawyers as there had been many cases of malpractices involving clients' money.

Dr Mahathir revealed that he himself had been a victim of a lawyer who refused to return his deposit although the deal involved was not successful.

"This happened before I became a minister.

"It was difficult to complain then," he quipped.

Asked whether there had been any improvement in the role of the Bar Council a year after he had touched on the subject at the Umno general assembly, he said that he had not seen any.

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