

# Plan to clip Bar Council's power

5 11 NOV 1991

THE Government is prepared to consider any proposal to curtail the power of the Bar Council, including amending the Legal Profession Act, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He said the Government was also ready to consider any amendment to the Constitution as part of the action.

However, he said, any action to be taken by the Government would be within the law.

"We will not do anything that does not comply with the law. We will uphold the rule of law. It is only the Bar Council that does not adhere to the rule of law," he said at a press conference at the end of the three-day Umno general assembly.

The Prime Minister said he was sure that the Bar Council would give a slanted report of the proceedings of the general assembly to bodies such as the American Bar As-

sociation.

Earlier, when delivering his adjournment speech at the assembly, Dr Mahathir said the Government had always upheld the rule of law and that the judiciary was a necessary system

He said laws such as the Internal Security Act were passed through the proper legal process in Parliament.

In jest, he said that when Finance Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was arrested during his student days for taking part in a demonstration, it was under the ISA, according to the law.

"They (Bar Council) talk of the rule of law but the ISA is also part of the rule of law which was passed by Parliament," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the opposition had used the ISA as an issue in many general elections because it was purportedly a bad law but the opposition al-

ways lost, which showed that the people supported the ISA.

He said the laws provided for the removal of a Lord President under the Constitution, adding that in every country there were laws allowing the removal of their Lord Presidents

"It can be done through a Tribunal comprising both local and foreign judges. We complied with the law by setting up such a tribunal," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Tun Salleh Abas was given the opportunity to defend himself to the Tribunal but "he refused, and that is his problem."

He said the Bar Council had, however, gone against the rule of law when it tried to remove Lord President Tun Hamid Omar by taking him to court for alleged contempt of court.

He challenged the Bar Council to show which part of the Constitution

stipulated that a Lord President could be removed this way.

"They should look at themselves first before accusing others of not upholding the rule of law," he said to the cheers of the delegates.

Dr Mahathir also took a swipe at former Lord President Tun Suffian Hashim for making a speech that US President George Bush was envious of his (Dr Mahathir's) power.

"Why don't we exchange our powers then? Give me George Bush's powers and I give him mine. No problem," he added.

Dr Mahathir urged Tun Suffian to get Mr Bush to take over his job as Umno president and Malaysian Prime Minister.

He joked that he could get into trouble with the United States for his remarks at this assembly, adding that "it is our mistake" appointing Tun Suffian as Lord President.