

Lawyers should stop govt bashing first, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR: Lawyers should stop "government bashing" if they do not want to be bashed, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"If lawyers do not want us to bash them, then they should stop bashing us," the Prime Minister said.

"Lawyers and the Bar Council cannot deny they are not doing this, especially with the action in trying to get the Lord President unconstitutionally removed from office and smear campaigns being conducted overseas."

Dr Mahathir was speaking to newsmen after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting here.

Bar Council president Manjeet Singh Dhillon

had last week called for a stop to "lawyer bashing" by certain quarters in the country.

He said that while there had been repeated allegations that Malaysian legal firms were involved in smear campaigns against the Government overseas, no proof had been produced.

The Prime Minister said the Bar Council was using foreign-based non-governmental organisations to apply pressure on the Government.

"This is the Bar Council's style. Using pressures from outside against us," he said.

"They appear as if they are unhappy with our independence and prosperity and try to bring the

country under a form of colonisation from NGOs."

"We have our system and way of evaluating things. Problems should be settled internally."

Dr Mahathir said he had been informed of who were involved in smear campaigns, but declined to reveal their identities.

On a suggestion from Umno Youth that the Government revoke contracts given to lawyers whose firms are involved in anti-government activities, he said: "The Government will consider the suggestion."

"While we do not want to force legal firms to support the government it does not mean that we will support them as the money paid to them can

be used in activities not beneficial to the country."

On the proposal that light sentences be imposed for certain criminal offences to reduce crowding in prisons, he said while the idea was good, the sentence must be effective.

"We find that society has to bear the cost of taking care of offenders whenever they are sent to jail."

"This way society is being punished also. This is not right."

"The offender must be made to pay for lodging and food when he is serving his sentence by doing labour," he said, adding that money spent on the prisoners could be used for development projects.