

PM lauds Manjeet's stand

By LEE KAR YEAN

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday praised former Bar Council chairman Manjeet Singh Dhilon for his stand against the council.

"I feel he is a brave man for he would surely be criticised severely by the Bar Council after being accused of changing his stand.

"However, from his explanations on Saturday he stated that he has not changed his stand but the situation now has changed," the Prime Minister said.

Manjeet Singh resigned at the 46th Malaysian Bar annual general meeting on Saturday, citing differences with the Bar's majority decision to reject reconciliation with Lord President Tun Hamid Omar.

Dr Mahathir described the action by the lawyers to oust Hamid as that of frustrated people because they could not come into power.

The Bar Council, he said, was influenced by the political ideology of opposition parties and many of them were aligned with the opposition.

"Their action is unlike lawyers but of people who are frustrated because they could not come into

power. They have abused whatever little power they have.

"It is up to the public to judge now if the Bar Council is a lawyers' council or a political party," he told reporters after launching World Consumers Day here.

Asked if the Government would introduce a code of ethics for lawyers, he said such a code would be of no use if the lawyers refused to abide by it.

"They have their own code of ethics and even then they do not abide by it," he said.

He reiterated that the Bar Council had interfered with the judicial system when it disregarded the 1989 Supreme Court ruling in reaffirming the Lord President's position.

"While the Bar Council is furious with the Government for taking action, in accordance with the law, against (former LP) Tun Salleh Abas, the council did not hesitate to take legal action against Tun Hamid, so what is the difference?"

"On one hand the Bar Council has accused the Government of interfering with the judiciary but on the other hand the council had gone against the Constitution to restrict the judiciary."

Dr Mahathir said the

council appeared to be its own arbitrator by disregarding the Supreme Court's decision.

The Malaysian Bar passed a resolution at the 1988 extraordinary general meeting expressing lack of confidence in Hamid after the suspension of Salleh Abas.

The Bar also called for Hamid's resignation over his representations to the Yang di-Pertuan Agong which resulted in the suspension of five Supreme Court judges.

A year after the 1988 resolution, the Supreme Court decided on the issues and ruled that there was no contempt by Hamid.

"It seems that the Bar Council will only respect the judiciary only when all the judges are pro-Bar Council," said Dr Mahathir.

"Recently the council tried to interfere in the selection of members of the judiciary and they wanted to be consulted on appointment of judges. This shows that the council has no principles."

"The question remains — does the Bar Council respect the judiciary and regard it as independent?"

"If they believed in the independence of the judiciary they should not impose their own opinions on the judicial system."