

21 FEB 1997

Bar-Judiciary (News Analysis)

BAR-JUDICIARY TIES MAY BE ON THE MEND

By: Azman Ujang

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Malaysian lawyers have taken a major step to normalise relations with the judiciary and indications are that their eight years of strained ties will end soon.

The opportunity to mend the ties presents itself when local lawyers play host to the 7th annual meeting and conference of the Inter-Pacific Bar Association (IPBA), the pre-eminent organisation of business and commercial lawyers in the Asia-Pacific region.

The five-day event from April 28 at the Istana Hotel here has received the full backing of Chief Justice of the Federal Court, Tan Sri Eusoff Chin, who will also open the conference and deliver a keynote address.

To be attended by 500 lawyers from 60 countries, it is believed to be the biggest conference of the legal fraternity to be held in Malaysia.

According to organising secretary S. Radhakrishnan, besides the international significance of the conference in "selling" Malaysia to the world, it is also important because of the olive branch extended to members of the Bar by Eusoff as head of the country's judiciary.

Bar-judiciary relations hit a crisis in 1988 after the sacking of then Lord President Tun Salleh Abas on charges of misconduct, an episode regarded by the Bar as a threat to the independence of the judiciary.

The Bar Council passed a vote of no-confidence against Salleh's successor Tun Abdul Hamid Omar, who chaired the Special Tribunal which found Salleh guilty of the charges.

Since then, relations have been strained but legal circles said things began to improve when Eusoff took over from Hamid two years ago.

It led to a positive change of attitude on both sides and Eusoff's personal support for the coming conference is seen as an important step to ending what some lawyers described as a sad and unfortunate chapter in the country's legal history.

Eusoff, in a message to the IPBA conference, said the choice of Kuala Lumpur as the venue is not only a great honour to the legal fraternity but also a great honour to the country.

Since its establishment in 1991, the IPBA has grown to over 2,500 members from 66 countries.

One of its objectives is to provide substantive support by lawyers to their clients in respect of growing and new business enterprises and opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region, the world's fastest growing economic region.

Radhakrishnan said the IPBA conference is also significant because, for the first time, Malaysian lawyers have taken the initiative to promote Malaysia's economic development.

"This is to complement the untiring efforts of our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who has travelled the whole world to meet the captains of industry in the respective countries," he said.

He said as lawyers attending the conference were directly or indirectly connected to the business concerns in the region, it would be a great opportunity to "sell" Malaysia as well.

"Their presence here during the conference will enable them to advise the captains of industry in the IPBA member countries of the vast business and commercial and investment opportunities in Malaysia besides exchanging notes with their Malaysian counterparts," he said.

The highlight of the conference is a plenary session which will discuss

the implications of globalisation with the implementation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules on the legal profession.

Among the panelists of this session is International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

According to Eusoff in his message, delegates to the conference would get a better insight into WTO's crusade against protectionism.

"As barriers to international trade diminish, competition law issues proliferate. The business and commercial lawyers in the region are expected to keep abreast of the developments that are taking place in the face of increasing globalisation of personal and business movement and activity," he said. -- BERNAMA

AU CTL