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Bar Council voices surprise at remark

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Bar Council today expressed surprise at the assertion by Umno Supreme Council member Datuk Ibrahim Ali that its members had been making destructive criticisms against the Government.

Bar Council president R.R. Chelvarajah said of the 36 council members, only the president was authorised to make statements or speak to the Press on behalf of the body and, in his absence, the vice-president or the secretary.

"I don't know where he got the impression that council members have been making derogatory statements about the Government as, to my knowledge, only I or the vice-president have made Press statements," he told the New Straits Times.

Ibrahim, who is Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said at the Umno general assembly yesterday the Government might review the Bar Council's position as its members had been running down the Government and the judiciary lately.

Chelvarajah said official Press statements by the council had always been consistent with the principles of democracy, rule of law and due administration of justice.

"We make these statements without fear or favour, without regard to our own interests or that of our members," he said, adding that the uppermost consideration was to uphold the cause of justice.

However, Chelvarajah said, Ibrahim should realise that members of the Bar were not necessarily members of the Bar Council.

"Any lawyer can stand up and say anything, but it is incorrect to say that it is the Bar Council saying it."

On Ibrahim's statement that the Government might consider making the Attorney-General council president, Chelvarajah pointed out that leaders such as Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and former Prime Minister the late Tun Hussein Onn had said the independence of the Bar Council should be respected.

"Unless the people who lead the Bar are elected by its members, it cannot be independent," he said.

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