

13/09/1999

Law forum may discuss state of local judiciary

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PETALING JAYA, Sun. - The state of the Malaysian judiciary may be raised at the 12th Commonwealth Law Conference which begins tomorrow although no discussion on specific countries has been scheduled.

Organising committee co-chairman Datuk Dr Cyrus V. Das said although the conference was not being held to discuss judicial issues in specific countries, issues on Malaysia may be raised during question time.

"Such issues may or may not be raised," he said at a Press conference, adding that the conference will not produce statements or declarations focusing on specific countries.

Das said the idea of the law conference, which many have said comes at a very "interesting" time given the focus of the international community on the Malaysian judicial system, was to provide an opportunity for lawyers to meet and discuss various issues about law in the coming century.

"It is an excellent opportunity for us to discuss issues on what the Commonwealth laws stand for ... rule of law, human rights and promotion of human development."

However, outgoing president of the Commonwealth Lawyers Association Rodney Hansen QC conceded that the recent jailing of Far Eastern Economic Review journalist Murray Hiebert may unavoidably be discussed.

"There are various aspects of the case which will interest the delegates when they enter into discussions on freedom of expression."

But, Hansen added that the domestic issues may be used to compare the situations in different countries.

Das said one of the issues that will be highlighted will be the Latimer House Guidelines which aims for the implementation of the principles of the Harare Declaration 1991 on good governance.

The Latimer guidelines touch on the relationship between the judiciary, parliament and executive, and were devised last year at a meeting of Commonwealth lawyers, judges, legal teachers, parliamentarians and representatives of human rights organisations in London.

Hansen said the conference is likely to produce a declaration on the Latimer guidelines which would be forwarded to the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in South Africa.

"We are hoping that it becomes a standard or model of good governance for various branches of Commonwealth governments."

He added that the issue would be discussed during two sessions dedicated to it on Wednesday.

Themed Law and Society in The 21st Century, the triennial conference is being held for the first time in Malaysia. As of today, 1,318 delegates have confirmed their participation.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will open the three-day conference at the Sunway Pyramid Convention Centre tomorrow, while Nobel laureate Professor Wole Soyinka will deliver the keynote address.

Das said discussions will touch on six core areas namely, environmental protection, independence of the judiciary, human rights, democracy and rule of law, criminal liability, the legal profession, international law and international dealings and corporate governance.

Apart from the conference proper, which will involve 150 speakers, there will be 12 satellite meetings such as the Commonwealth Chief Justices meeting and the Commonwealth Law Reform Agencies/Commission meeting.

Meanwhile, Das was elected president of the CLA today at its triennial

general meeting. He becomes the first Asian to take up the position for a three-year period.

The meeting also decided that the next two conferences will be held in Harare in 2001 and Melbourne in 2004.

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