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PM to consult Cabinet on call to repeal ISA

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Prime Minister has given an assurance that he will raise in the Cabinet a Bar Council's call to repeal the Internal Security Act.

Newly-elected Bar Council president R.R. Chelvarajah said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had told them, at a meeting on Thursday, that any decision would have to be a collective one.

The meeting between the Bar Council and Prime Minister was the first in 15 years. The council delegation was led by then president Datuk Dr Cyrus Das.

Chelvarajah said the council handed over a memorandum calling for the repeal of the ISA and other preventive detention laws to the Prime Minister, and briefed him that many Commonwealth countries, like South Africa, had already repealed such laws.

"He seemed sympathetic," he told reporters after the Malaysian Bar annual general meeting today.

The council also raised its concerns about the Attorney-General's decision to enforce the provisions of the Legal Profession Act which would enable him to allow foreign lawyers to practise in Malaysia.

The provisions, enacted 21 years ago, were enforced on Feb 1.

He said Prime Minister was also briefed on the need for the council to be consulted in judicial appointments, at least on an informal basis.

Asked how Dr Mahathir responded, he said the Prime Minister said it was difficult to find the right people and took note of the council's suggestion.

Chelvarajah said the council also presented a memorandum on the cases of people shot dead by the police and suggested that inquiries be held to restore the confidence of the public.

"He took note of this and agreed to look into it."

He said the delegation also raised the need for the council to be supplied with Bills before they were tabled in Parliament in order for lawyers to provide feedback.

"We are very encouraged by the meeting. We had the distinct feeling that this was the right approach and a meaningful, on-going thing can be established."

He said the Prime Minister also accepted an invitation to present the opening address at the Commonwealth Law Conference to be held from Sept 13 to 16.

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