

15/06/2000

Bar Council's move to hold EGM `is in national interest'

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Bar Council president Sulaiman Abdullah said today the Bar's only agenda is national interest, and it does not have political affiliations or motives.

He said its move to hold an extraordinary general meeting to discuss motions on judicial integrity was motivated by public interest as the judiciary was certainly a national issue.

"The Government must surely have the same interest. There can't be two minds about the country needing an impartial judiciary.

"This is not about the Bar intimidating the judges, it is about the integrity and independence of the judiciary," he told the New Straits Times.

He said judicial integrity was not only important to Malaysians but also to foreign investors.

Sulaiman said he did not have the "slightest idea" why Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had suggested that the Bar had been instigated to call for an investigation into the conduct of Chief Justice Tun Mohd Eusoff Chin.

Dr Mahathir said yesterday he believed that there were political motives to create friction between the government and judiciary over the controversy.

The controversy had begun with Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Rais Yatim's criticism of Eusoff's holiday in New Zealand in 1994, purportedly with lawyer Datuk V.K. Lingam.

The Bar Council took up the issue later and called for an EGM on June 23 to debate a motion calling for a tribunal to investigate Eusoff.

Sulaiman said the Bar membership of over 9,000 cuts across all political opinions and it would be impossible for it to take up any particular party's position.

He said the Bar thought it best to call for a tribunal, as provided for in the Federal Constitution, to give Eusoff a chance to clear the air as the issue has become convoluted.

Following Rais' comments, Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin and Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein had also made comments and later senior judges had joined in.

Sulaiman said the council's opposition to the tribunal set up in 1988 to remove the then Lord President Tun Salleh Abas did not mean that it was questioning the constitutional provision for tribunals.

"We had questioned if it was used in a bona fide manner or to solve party political problems," he said in response to Dr Mahathir's comment that the Bar's stand on tribunals was not clear.

"Today there are no political problems and thus, no question of influencing judges to be for or against the Government," he said.

Asked about lawyer K. Raja Segaran's bill of costs for RM750,856.75 against the council, Sulaiman said it would be contested when the matter comes up before a court registrar.

Raja Segaran, who filed the bill in the High Court yesterday, was awarded costs after the council lost in its bid to strike out his application for an injunction to stop its EGM last November.

The council' appeal against the injunction will be heard on July 3.

(END)