

Bar told not to be biased

PM: Gani qualified for position of attorney-general

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By Claudia Theophilus

PUTRAJAYA, Mon: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad criticised the Bar Council yesterday for taking sides over the appointment of Datuk Abdul Gani Patail as the attorney-general.

Referring to the trial of former deputy prime minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in which Gani prosecuted, Mahathir said based on that one high-profile case, the entire prosecution team, including the witnesses and judges, was severely criticised.

"I don't think it is right for the Bar Council to take sides. Why can't they consider that government officers have the duty to prosecute?" he told reporters at his Hari Raya open house for VIPs at Seri Perdana here.

"I feel the Bar Council should not be influenced by politically-tainted views. These views are not based on Gani's ability."

He has also not received a letter from the Bar Council which was reportedly sent on Dec 13 expressing concern over Abdul Gani's appointment based on a full council meeting on Dec 8.

Council vice-chairman Roy Rajasingham had said although the move was decided, he was not sure whether the letter had already been sent.

When told of arguments that there are more qualified people than Gani, Mahathir said it is a matter of opinion.

"What is to determine who is qualified? Do you mean to say that the opinion of those unhappy with the court decision is much better than those who uphold it? Why not

give him a chance to carry out his duties first. Instead, they are being very biased," he said.

The Bar Council had reportedly raised the Federal Court judgment in the contempt case of former chairman Zainur Zakaria, which had touched on Gani's alleged conduct.

The court had found Zainur in contempt for filing an application to disqualify Gani from prosecuting Anwar in 1998 because of the latter's conduct in securing evidence.

He also said that those who oppose the appointment have political links with the Opposition, refer-

ring to protests by the DAP, PAS, Aliran and Suaram.

On Nov 20, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim announced Abdul Gani's appointment, taking over from Datuk Seri Ainum Mohd Saaid, who tendered her resignation, citing health reasons.

This sparked off protests over the unconstitutionality of the appointment without the King's consent.

Gani will be formally appointed on Jan 1. In the interim, Solicitor-General Datuk Heliliah Mohd Yusof will be the acting AG.