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PM: Give Gani chance to prove himself

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Incoming Attorney-General Datuk Abdul Gani Patail should be given a chance to prove himself, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Describing criticism of Abdul Gani's qualification as "a matter of opinion," he said it was unfair to question his credibility at this juncture.

"One person says there are more qualified people, but others say that Abdul Gani is qualified.

"What determines who is qualified? Are the opinions of those who are unhappy with the courts' decisions much better than those who uphold the courts' decision?" he said.

Abdul Gani, 46, will succeed Datuk Seri Ainum Mohd Saaid who has resigned on health grounds. He will take office on Jan 1, next year.

His appointment has met with protests from the Opposition and human rights groups, and most recently, the Bar Council.

After the announcement, DAP national chairman Lim Kit Siang, Aliran and Suaram registered their objections.

Subsequently, the Opposition and non-governmental organisations, led by Pas youth chief Mahfuz Omar, also sent a protest note to Parliament, saying that the announcement was made before the Royal assent was given.

Last Thursday, the New Straits Times reported that Bar Council had sent a letter to the Prime Minister expressing its concern, and stating that the Attorney-General must be a person who commanded respect.

The council had raised a Federal Court judgment (in the case of Zainur Zakaria), which queried Abdul Gani's conduct when gathering evidence to prosecute former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim in 1998.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfair to criticise Abdul Gani based on the fact that he led the prosecution team in the corruption and sodomy trials of Anwar.

He chided the Bar Council for being easily influenced by "political opinions".

He said the council was biased as it failed to consider Abdul Gani's true capability but rather, his involvement in a "high-profile case".

"This is unfair as Gani deserves a chance to prove himself.

"In Abdul Gani's case, almost all of those who became prosecution witnesses, including the police and lawyers, were labelled as useless, biased and all kinds of other accusations," he said.

Asked if he had received the council's letter, Dr Mahathir said he had not.

"But 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?"

The Prime Minister also lambasted human rights groups for opposing Abdul Gani's appointment.

"The reality is that the NGOs are also unfair. They are biased."

On the confusion over Abdul Gani's appointment as announced by Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim, Dr Mahathir said it arose over a matter of procedure.

He said the Yang di-Pertuan Agong then had not signed the appointment letter and thus, the Government could not make an announcement at that time.

Rais had announced on Nov 19, that the Government had accepted Ainum's resignation on health grounds.

"But Rais was a bit anxious to make a statement before the King's assent," said Dr Mahathir.

Ainum is now on leave and Solicitor-General Datuk Heliliah Mohd Yusof is the acting Attorney-General. It was earlier announced that Abdul Gani would be acting A-G but there was an about-turn following the protests.
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