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CJ: More going to court for redress

By Aniza Damis

PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - Who says Malaysians have lost faith in the court system?

The Chief Justice today released statistics that showed more Malaysians were filing civil cases in court and then declared: "This increase disproves claims by the detractors that the people have lost faith in the courts."

Tan Sri Ahmad Fairuz Sheikh Abdul Halim noted that in the 15-month period between April 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004, the registration of cases in the Magistrates Court had risen by 85 per cent, compared to the preceeding 15 months between January 1, 2002 and March 31, 2003.

In the Sessions Court, the registration of civil cases saw an increase of 115 per cent, and in the High Court the increase was 111 per cent.

He noted that the increase in the number of new cases had prompted the judiciary to push for the use of the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system. The ADR system enables parties in civil cases to settle their cases through mediation.

Ahmad Fairuz said they would test the system in the High Court first.

The Chief Justice's Office has had success in reducing the backlog of cases, with 65 per cent of all pre-2000 cases disposed of in the last seven months.

In response to the Bar Council's concerns that justice may be sacrificed at the altar of speed, Ahmad Fairuz said the possibility of this happening was very slim.

"I am confident that my judges and legal officers are not only equipped to ensure justice, but they also have the best protection against corruption, which is a conscience," he said.

He made these comments at the swearing-in ceremony of judges at the Palace of Justice, here, today.

Datuk Abdul Malek Ahmad was sworn in as the Court of Appeal president and Court of Appeal judge Datuk Alauddin Mohd Sheriff was elevated to Federal Court judge.

Today's ceremony also saw three judicial commissioners being confirmed before Chief Judge of the High Court of Malaya Tan Sri Haidar Mohd Noor. They are Datuk Zakaria Sam, Syed Ahmad Helmy Syed Ahmad and Su Geok Yiam.

More judicial commissioners would be appointed "soon", Ahmad Fairuz said.

Malek, who spoke briefly to reporters, said that he would be focusing on two main issues: reducing the waiting time for appeals to be heard and getting appeal judges to give judgments faster.

He said that he would be going down to the ground to assess the situation before deciding on further action.

"The post (of Court of Appeal president) has been vacant for a long time, so I've got to go and see what's happening," Malek said.

The post has been vacant for 16 months, since the then president, Ahmad Fairuz, was appointed Chief Justice last year.

Malek, 60, began his legal career as a magistrate in Kuala Lumpur in 1966. He was a High Court judge from 1985 to 1995 and a Court of Appeal judge from 1995 to 1999.

On May 1, 1999, he was made a Federal Court judge.

Among the important cases he dealt with as Federal Court judge was the RM100 million defamation suit by former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim against former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad in

1999.

Malek was also on the Federal Court panel which ruled as unlawful the 60-day detention order by the police against five Opposition leaders and activists under the Internal Security Act.

Alauddin, 58, started his career as a legal officer in 1966. He was made a High Court judge in 1992, and served in Kangar and Alor Star. He was made Court of Appeal judge on April 1, 2001.

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