

THE STAR

DATE: 30/03/2008

Salleh's in the news again after 20 years

TWENTY years later, Tun Salleh Abas makes the headlines again.

After years of disquiet over his sacking as Lord President, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department and de facto law minister Datuk Zaid Ibrahim proposed last Saturday for an apology to Salleh.

Since then, many have joined the fray. Opposition leader Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail took the call a step further. She suggested the formation of an independent commission to restore the judiciary's integrity.

Wan Azizah, the president of PKR, said Zaid's proposal that the government issue the apology was inadequate.

DAP national chairman Karpal Singh, called instead for Dr Mahathir to apologise to Salleh and the other two judges implicated in the crisis.

He said that calling for the present government under Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to apolo-

gise was not a step in the right direction.

"Dr Mahathir should apologise to the judges implicated in the 1988 judicial crisis," said Karpal Singh.

"It is not the present administration which convened those tribunals. The two tribunals in 1988 were initiated by Dr Mahathir. So, he should apologise," said the Bukit Gelugor MP.

On Wednesday, however, the new Cabinet decided not to adopt Zaid's proposal.

Dr Mahathir, in a letter, hit out at Zaid saying that "the person asking that the government apologise for what happened to Tun Salleh Abbas may have forgotten that, as president of the Muslim Lawyers Association, he (Zaid) fully supported the action that was taken... Now he wants to be more correct than correct. I wonder why."

But this time, the matter was not laid to rest immediately, many still



Zaid: Brought in to reform the judiciary

think something should be done to appease the majority.

Sarawak lawyer George Lo was quoted in the *Borneo Post* yesterday as saying the official apology would be a giant leap for the government.

"Let's get our priorities right. An

official apology is good. It starts the process of healing and redeems the honour for the three judges.

"Unfortunately, with all the hue and cry it has generated, the apology looks like an uphill task now. But let's keep our eye on the ball," Lo said.

He added that Zaid was brought in to reform the judiciary and ensure that the courts were truly independent.

"Let's not be distracted from that ultimate goal," he said.

Well-known lawyer Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, is one of those who viewed the proposal for a government apology as a positive move.

"It is a step in the right direction. The government must recognise that the attack on the judiciary left it vulnerable to influences that have continuously undermined the institution since.

"Scandals like the Lingam video have their roots in the Tun Salleh

affair. A process of reconciliation is vital to the healing of the judiciary," said Malik, who is also the National Human Rights Society (Hakam) president.

Bar president Ambiga Sreenevasan said: "It is high time to do such things, which had been there for some 20 years and the minister's move is absolutely correct. We wholeheartedly support him.

"Everybody knows that the 1988 judicial crisis was all a sham. Might as well do the right thing now. What had happened then was an executive interference in the judiciary," she said.

There are, of course, others who think that the apology should not be made due to its far-reaching effect.

Whatever the stand is, one thing is certain — the call has drawn more dynamic public debates and the fact that the suggestion was made by a minister in the ruling Government has made all the difference.