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Zaid: Govt has to apologise

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'We should seek forgiveness from the victims of 1988 judicial crisis'

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KOTA BARU: The Federal Government must make an open apology to those victimised by the judicial crisis in 1988 that led to the sacking of the then Lord President Tun Mohd Salleh Abbas, said newly-appointed de facto Law Minister Datuk Zaid Ibrahim.

"We should seek forgiveness. In the eyes of the world, the judicial crisis has weakened our judiciary system," he said.

The Minister in the Prime Min-

ister's Department said that although the issue was 20 years old, an apology was needed as it was wrongly handled and Tun Salleh's sacking was inappropriate.

From 1988, the judiciary's independence was eroded and led to allegations of corruption and abuse of power, he said.

The open apology would be one of his three main goals and would give a mandate for a fresh chapter to unfold in the country's judiciary system, Zaid said at a thanksgiving feast to mark his appointment as a federal minister.

His second goal would be to strengthen judicial independence and the delivery of justice by revamping the appointment and promotion process of the country's judges and magistrates.

Capable judges of integrity were important to help lure foreign investors, who had, in the past, expressed doubts about the country's judiciary, he said.

Zaid said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi was serious about revamping the judiciary and making it transparent.

The minister said his third aim was to strengthen the judiciary with the help and cooperation from all stakeholders such as the Judges, Attorney-General, the Bar Council and law enforcers such as the police.

Zaid said the judiciary must attract the best minds and good legal officers who were only loyal to the law.

"Their loyalty should not be to politicians or businessmen.

"Their moral and good judgment practices must be guided by the legal compass," said Zaid.

He added that this would restore

public trust in the judiciary.

"I am not a play-safe politician. I want to accomplish things and do what is right for the country," he said.

A sequence of political events led to Tun Salleh's sacking after a judiciary-appointed Commonwealth Tribunal found him guilty of "misbehaviour."

He was then dismissed as Lord President and this led to local and international protests, including from the Bar Council, International Commission of Jurists meeting and from the Law Asia Association.