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Fundamental reform to judiciary not easy, says Zaid

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KUALA LUMPUR: The effort of introducing fundamental reform to the judiciary will not be easy but the country needs it and the people want it, said de facto Law Minister Datuk Zaid Ibrahim.

In his address at the Malaysian Bar Council dinner yesterday, Zaid also mentioned amendment to the Federal Constitution, but did not announce the amendment involved.

However, when met by reporters after the prime minister's keynote address themed Delivering Justice, Renewing Trust, Zaid said the public and the legal fraternity can expect some development to Article 121(1) of the Constitution which provides for the judicial power of the Federation.

Zaid also paid tribute the Bar and commended it for its steadfast stand, its independence and resoluteness in defence of justice.

"I acknowledge that we will not always be in agreement but I don't always regard those who have different opinion as enemies.

"I trust the Bar will continue to be a responsible critic - to support where it is due, not just to criticise but to help create," he added.

The restoration of Article 121(1) was also raised by Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenevasan in her address, saying the provision would return powers to the judiciary.

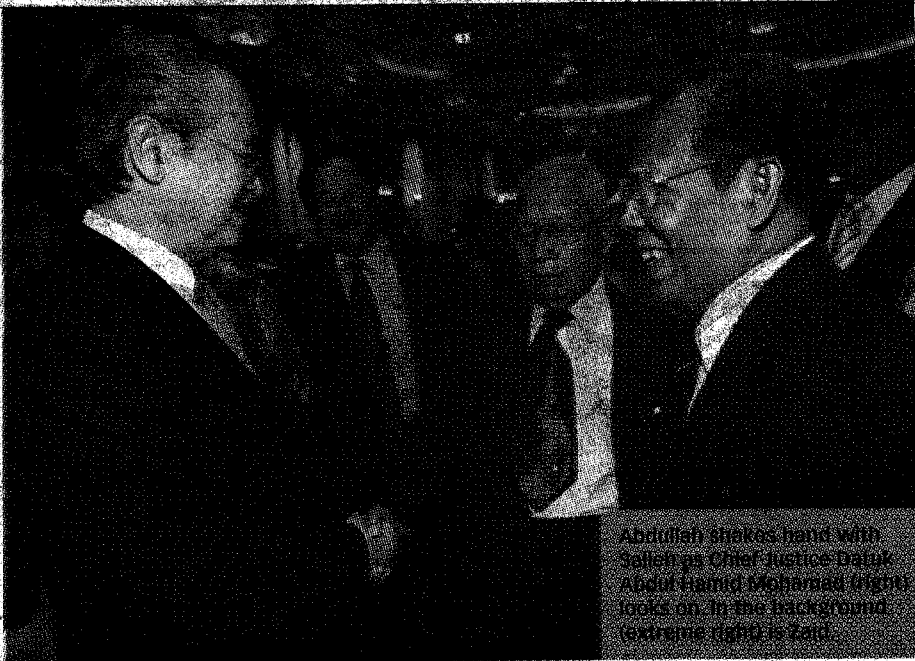
"We welcome the proposal to restore the provision because the judicial powers rest and must rest in the judiciary," she said to a loud applause from the floor.

Ambiga noted that "recent events have taught us that the current system does not work and is no longer acceptable to the Malaysian public".

She added that the legal profession will continue to play its part and endeavour to strengthen the legal system from within.

"We will never shy away from criticism and will listen to the public's opinions," she said, also taking the opportunity to voice the Bar's concern over the Internal Security Act detainees to the premier.

"We appeal to you to look at their cases again and revise the decisions that have been made and we hope Datuk Seri, that you will be open to further



Abdullah shakes hand with Salleh as Omer Justice Datuk Abdul Hamid Mohamed (right) looks on. In the background George (right) is seen.

discussing this issue with us," she said.

Ambiga had also paid tribute to the six judges in the 1988 judicial crisis - Tan Sri Wan Sulaiman Pawanteh, Tun Salleh Abas, Datuk Seri George Seah, Tan Sri Eusoffe Abdulcader, Tan Sri Wan Hamzah Mohd Salleh and Tan Sri Mohd Azmi Kamaruddin.

"They were heroes to us and it is the hour of trial that makes men great, not the hour of triumph and the Bar recognises that.

"After 20 years we hope due recognition is given to the brave acts of these men who are victors," she said, acknowledging the presence of former judges and family members of those who could not be present.

Also present at the dinner were Barisan Nasional and Pakatan Rakyat leaders including Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu, Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, the bloggers community and representatives of various non-governmental organisations.