

**Bar Still An Important Partner In Rule Of Law, Says Najib
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KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Malaysian Bar remained an important partner in the rule of law and administration of justice in the country although the government did not always agree with some of its views and activities.

The Prime Minister said despite the occasional belligerence, both in politics and the legal profession, the government still listened to what the body had to say and took a keen interest in what they did.

"We may make the occasional joke about lawyers, but nonetheless they have a unique and important role to play in our country," said Najib at the International Malaysia Law Conference 2012, here today.

However Najib said he was fully aware that some in the law fraternity, especially those in the area of human rights, chose to see "the glass as half empty rather than half full", notwithstanding the government's gradual introduction of progressive legislation over the past year.

"To them I have this to say: Walls are more easily crumbled than foundations raised. Just as Rome was not built in a day, the building of a just, equitable and democratic Malaysia cannot be achieved overnight," he said.

Najib said that law reforms such as the decision to rescind three Emergency Proclamations leading to the expiry of Emergency Ordinances showed that the government had delivered on its promises to the people.

He noted that the government had also decided to repeal the Internal Security Act 1971, Banishment Act 1959 and Restricted Residence Act 1933 as well as to amend the Printing Presses and Publication Act 1984 for better rights to freedom of speech and expression.

To uphold every citizen's right to freedom of assembly, section 27 of the Police Act was abolished and the Peaceful Assembly Act 2011 was introduced, while the government simultaneously expressed its intention to repeal the Sedition Act of 1948, he added.

"We've already embarked on several steps but the journey is long and will continue. These are a few examples to corroborate when we say 'We walk the talk'.

"Judge me not by what I say but by what I do," he said promising that the reforms would be irreversible.

Referring to the launch of the National Legal Aid Foundation (YBGK) in February last year, Najib said it was another milestone towards ensuring that access to justice was made available to individuals who were arrested.

YBGK provides free legal aid and advice to all Malaysians (irrespective of their financial means) at the police station during questioning, remand hearing and when they are charged in court.

According to Najib, it is estimated that 539 people were arrested every day by the police in Peninsular Malaysia alone.

Najib said although the right to legal advice and representation was included in Section 28A of the Criminal Procedure Code, the establishment of YBGK was a firm expression of the government's commitment to breathe life into Article 5(3) of the Federal Constitution, which states that those under arrest should be allowed to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice.

"The positive result of this initiative is apparent. Between April and July 2012 alone, YBGK lawyers have assisted 16,274 persons from remand up to hearing," he said.

Najib also quoted his late father Tun Abdul Razak Hussein, who opened the inaugural Malaysian Law Conference in 1971, where as the country's second prime minister he emphasised the importance of mutual cooperation between the Bar and the administration to better serve the people.

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