

## Legal rebels with a cause

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By Chelsea L.Y. Ng PETALING JAYA: A group described as “the young lawyers” is mounting a rebellion against the Bar Council, calling for reform and justice within the legal profession.

Just a fortnight ago, the group, which claims to represent three-quarters of the 12,000-odd lawyers in the peninsula, voiced their frustrations through a statement at a legal convention.

The phrase “young lawyers” refers to those who have less than seven years in practice.

The eight-page statement, obtained by The Star on Tuesday, was read out at the Young Lawyers’ Convention held in Pangkor between Jan 28 and 30.

In the statement, the group called for the profession’s governing body, the Bar Council, to be censured for not doing enough to repeal Section 46A of the Legal Profession Act 1976.

Section 46A, which was introduced in the 1970s, bars lawyers under seven years of practice to hold any position in the Bar Council.

The group also made other demands, including:

asking for the formation of a Shadow-Council, with a similar composition as that of the Bar Council, made up of young lawyers;

calling for the reformation of the Bar Council election system;

calling for the revamp of the Bar Council secretariat so as to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency; and

asking the Bar Council to ensure that other professions and trades such as real estate agents, finance companies, trade mark agents and touts do not encroach on areas of legal practice and to create avenues for reporting such encroachment.

A member of “the young lawyers” group said the statement “had the council rocked into wanting to meet the young lawyers” but so far no official announcement or notices had been made or sent out.

Sources said the council wanted to meet the lawyers to gauge their response to the statement.

Bar Council chairman Kuthubul Zaman Bukhari when contacted, however, denied that there was a plan to meet the group.

Instead, he said the issues in the statement should be advanced in the upcoming Annual General Meeting next month where an election is expected.

He said the Bar Council had always been in support of the abolishment of Section 46A.

“Right from the beginning, in the 1970s, we have been challenging the inclusion of Section 46A on the grounds that it is unconstitutional.

“I, therefore, don’t understand why the young lawyers are saying we did not do what we should. We even supported the road show held after the first Young Lawyers’ convention in Cherating in 2003,” he said.

As for the formation of a shadow-council, Kuthubul said there was nothing barring young lawyers from having a dialogue with the Bar Council.