

People to be educated on danger posed by Al-Arqam

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The Al-Arqam movement has reached a level that may threaten national security, but the Government has to be cautious in dealing with it to avoid possible misunderstanding among the people. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the Government wanted to act decisively against the movement but would have to educate the people first on the matter.

He said many people still believed that Al-Arqam's activities were in line with Islam though they were not. Taking action against it might make the people think that the Government was suppressing an Islamic movement, he said.

"If we don't explain the danger posed by Arqam, the people may think we are suppressing an Islamic movement."

"If we suppress what the people consider an Islamic movement, they may not support the Government," Dr Mahathir said.

He was asked to comment on the Al-Arqam after opening the World Islamic Civilisation Festival '94 (WICF) at the Islamic Centre here.

Asked to comment on the denial by the movement that it has an armed unit of

313 called the *Tentera Bader* as alleged by the Islamic Centre, Dr Mahathir said he was convinced that the Islamic Centre had grounds to say so.

On Al-Arqam's call for a dialogue between the centre and the movement representatives to find the truth, Dr Mahathir said it would not help clear the issue.

Asked whether he considered the Al-Arqam which was reported to have 100,000 followers was a threat to national security, the Prime Minister said:

"It is an organisation, which is based on fanaticism and sensality cult, is a threat is not so much when it grows and the leader feels he is strong — certainly has an intention — and now the leader said that he wishes to become the country's leader."

"If we look at other Islamic countries, small movements are first harmless, but when they grow and get big support, certainly their leaders will have big ambition, which is to control the situation in the countries."

"We see the trend in the Al-Arqam . . . in the past we did not pay much attention because we then considered it a small deviant group," he said.

Asked whether he considered it a real threat to the country now, Dr Mahathir said it was "more or less a

threat".

"But what is important is that before things become too big and difficult to deal with, it is better to act," he said.

On the activities of the movement's leaders outside the country, Dr Mahathir said they were actively seeking support from those who did not know their actual teachings.

On whether it had possibly received the support of some leaders in Malaysia, the Prime Minister said it was possible for both parties to use each other's influence for their respective benefits.

Asked the sort of action that the Government would take against the Al-Arqam, the Prime Minister said:

"The first thing of course is to educate the people as to its deviational aspect. Arqam is teaching a religion that is not actually Islam and is making out their leader Ashaari (Mohamed) as the Imam Mahadi (the awaited one to be sent by God to proclaim to mankind that doomsday is near) . . . so we have to explain to the people before we take action."

On what he thought about Al-Arqam's economic activities, he said:

"Well . . . that is one of the ways they spread their influence. As you know they use children for the purpose of spreading their activities," he added.