

We're against trading blocs, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Malaysia opposes any move to form trading blocs by any group, be it America, Europe or countries of the East, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said if there was a trading bloc which should be set up, it should be a "world trading bloc" where the whole world becomes one trading bloc.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked to comment on a foreign agency report which said that leaders of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) forum were to consider a plan to turn the 17-member body into a powerful new trading bloc with some similarities to the original European Common Market.

The Prime Minister had

earlier opened the 14th meeting of Koperasi Usaha Bersatu (Malaysia) Berhad at Universiti Malaya.

The proposal, said to contain the potential to turn Apec into a discriminatory trade bloc, is to go before its Ministers in early September so that it can be considered at the November leaders' summit in Indonesia.

The report, originating from Sydney, Australia, stated that it came from an Eminent Persons Group of government-appointed politicians and economists charged with developing a blueprint for Apec's future.

However, the report said it appeared to conflict with the views of political leaders in Australia and elsewhere who made clear they have no wish to turn Apec into anything like the European

Union, particularly a discriminatory trade bloc.

Asked whether he would raise the matter at the coming leaders' summit in Jakarta which he is scheduled to attend, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not know yet. Maybe it will not become an issue."

However, he said Malaysia's stand on the matter was clear. It will not support any move to form trading blocs by any group.

On Al-Arqam, Dr Mahathir said the movement's teachings would be banned as it was against Islamic teachings and had reached a level where it could threaten Muslim unity and the nation's security.

Dr Mahathir said the Government's stand with regard to the movement was clear.

"Since it has deviated

from true Islamic teachings, therefore it is the Government's responsibility to prevent it from spreading.

"At first we do not give much consideration. We do not care about the way they dress. They can cover up their faces or walk with their eyes closed. That's their problem.

"But now they have deviated from the teachings of Islam and have reached a level where their activities could be a threat to Muslims in the country," he said.

He said if Muslim unity was threatened, it could affect peace and security of the nation.

He said the Government had to take action now as the group's followers had gone to the extent of worshipping their leader placing him on the same level as

the Prophet.

On whether he would be meeting Al-Arqam leader Ashaari Muhammad as requested by the movement in an effort to resolve their problems with the Government, Dr Mahathir said he would not do so.

Dr Mahathir said the matter could be resolved through discussions with Pusat Islam. He said Ashaari had placed himself on the same level as world leaders.

"I have not reached that level and therefore cannot meet him," he said, adding: "I think it's better for him to meet Pusat Islam (officials)."

Ashaari had refused to meet Pusat Islam officials but had instead sought a meeting with the Prime Minister.