

PM: Arqam party only if no deviant teachings

KUALA LUMPUR: Al Arqam can form a political party if it does not propagate deviant teachings, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

"We don't allow deviant Islamic teachings," he told reporters after opening the 23rd Gerakan annual delegates conference here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, who is Barisan chairman, said the Government had allowed other groups involved in spreading the teachings of Islam to form political parties.

To a question on movement leader Ashaari Muhammad's proposal that a referendum be conducted to determine whether he or the prime minister was more popular, Dr Mahathir said: "We do not have any provisions in the country to conduct a referendum just because one man thinks he is fit to become the prime minister."

He said if Ashaari felt that he was suitable for the job, he should contest in the elections.

"I am not inviting him, I am just saying that if he wants to contest in the elections he can contest properly . . . but don't try and bring about deviant teachings in this country because that is dangerous," said Dr Mahathir.

He said the Government had not taken action against Al Arqam before because the movement did not deviate during its early days.

However, he said Ashaari began to claim that the Prophet had appeared to him and called him "Sir."

Ashaari had influenced his followers into thinking that he was the "Messiah", Dr Mahathir said.

"We need to explain to the people why action had been taken," he said, adding that the people should leave the movement.