

ACTION ON ASHAARI

S-2 - AUG 1984

PM: Al Arqam leader to be prosecuted if he returns home

By LEE KAR YEAN, V. CHANDRASEKARAN and NORAZIAN ABDUL RAMAN

RAWANG: The Government will prosecute Al Arqam leader Ashaari Muhammad for spreading deviant teachings if he returns to Malaysia, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

"This time, we've got all the evidence, and I think it is very clear that they have deviated from the teachings of Islam," the Prime Minister said.

He said the Government did not clamp down on the movement earlier because of divided opinions about its teachings.

"In the past, the problem was that some people were not so convinced that Arqam had deviated but now it is very clear.

"I think there is less reluctance to act against them now. I am confident that action will be taken," Dr Mahathir told newsmen after opening the Perusahaan Otomobil Kedua Sdn Bhd plant, the manufacturer of the second national car *Kancil* in Serendah, near here.

Ashaari has been living in Thailand since 1988 on a self-imposed exile but his visa expired on July 20.

The Thai government has ordered Ashaari to leave the country. Indonesia, announced yesterday it will deny him entry.

Dr Mahathir said it would be up to the authorities to decide on what action to take against Ashaari should he return to the country.

● TURN TO PAGE 2

Dept can arrest Ashaari at checkpoint

● FROM PAGE ONE

In Kangar, the state Immigration Department said it was empowered to detain Ashaari if he entered the country via the Padang Besar checkpoint.

A spokesman for the department said action could be taken against Ashaari for tarnishing the country's image abroad.

Malaysian consul-general to Thailand Yahaya Jaabar said he was waiting for instructions from Kuala Lumpur when the National Fatwa Council announces its ruling on Friday to curb Al Arqam activities.

On the situation in Thailand, he said: "The majority of Muslims in southern Thailand do not sympathise with Al Arqam. The movement has more followers in the north."

Perlis police chief SAC (II) Foong Wai Sek said several Al Arqam members were arrested recently for distributing illegal leaflets.

In Seremban, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Haji Mohamed Isa Abdul Samad has directed village heads to check the credentials of preachers in their areas to prevent the spread of deviant teachings.