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Mahathir-Action

ATTORNEY-GENERAL TO DECIDE ON ACTION AGAINST ARQAM ACTIVITIES

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister <sup>194</sup> Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the type of action to be taken against the activities of Al Arqam, which was banned today, would be decided by the Attorney-General.

"We need to study the extent to which they conflict with the ruling of the National Fatwa Council and the laws of the country," he told reporters after a meeting of the Umno Supreme Council here today.

The National Fatwa Council ban, decided at a meeting today, covered the Al Arqam organisation, which is led by Ashaari Muhammad, and all its teachings and beliefs.

"The actions we take are to protect the Islamic religion as we do not want Malaysians to be deceived by the deviant teachings of Arqam," he said.

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Mahathir-Action 2 Kuala Lumpur

Dr Mahathir refuted insinuations in the foreign media that the action against Al Arqam was motivated by fear of the organisation.

"In the United States, tough action was taken against sect leader (David) Koresh with the government sending in soldiers who shot dead some people.

"Does this mean the American government was scared of Koresh? If their bigger scale action proved they feared Koresh, then only can they accuse us of being afraid of Arqam," he said.

He said the Malaysian government, however, would not go to the extent of using military force (against Al Arqam).

"The ban on Al Arqam is to safeguard the faith against deviations...deifying a leader can bring harmful results, possibly the more fanatical followers will do something bad," he said.

He said the tragedies which befell the followers of Koresh or those of Jim Jones who killed themselves in a mass suicide in Guyana must not be allowed to occur in Malaysia. -- more

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Responding to a question, Dr Mahathir said the Al Arqam-run schools should be closed as it was risky for the children to be taught false beliefs which would make them difficult to rehabilitate.

On Al Arqam's followers, he said they would be rehabilitated, including Malaysian students abroad, through informing them of the deviations of their movement.

Dr Mahathir said although the task of rehabilitating them would not be easy, especially the fanatical followers, the effort must still be made.

He believed the Al Arqam followers, who included Umno members, could be rehabilitated because they did not realise the deviations committed.

Asked on Al Arqam's economic activities, he said: "If the activities do not conflict with Islam, we cannot prohibit. But if they do business and produce things which contravene Islamic teachings, that is something else."

On the estimated 40 Al Arqam communes in the country, he said action would be taken if deviationist teachings continued to be taught there. -- more

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Mahathir-Action 4 (last) Kuala Lumpur

Asked on Al Arqam's plan to sue Pusat Islam over accusations made against the movement, Dr Mahathir said: "It is their right to bring the matter to court."

"I would be more pleased if they do so. We can then bring out all our evidence on the deviations," he added.

Asked whether the National Fatwa Council had been too slow in coming to a decision, he said: "It is not too late because, before we come out with a fatwa, we must study it thoroughly and there must be agreement.

"At the start, there were not many deviations in Arqam but now it is clear that he (Ashaari) considers himself as the Prophet, even possessing the attributes of God." -- Bernama

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