

# PM: We have proof it violated teachings

By  
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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. — The Government decided to take firm and positive action against Al Arqam because it has irrefutable evidence that the movement has blatantly violated Islamic teachings, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the movement's leader had even gone to the extent of claiming that he was a Messiah who had "person-to-person contact" with Prophet Muhammad.

Following the revelation by the National Fatwa Committee today, he said, the Government would direct the Attorney-General to recommend the various forms of action to be taken against the group by the respective agencies such as the police and Education Ministry.

He said the Government would disallow the operation of schools, kindergartens and other educational programmes of Al Arqam as they were against the teachings of Islam.

"It is important to stop the activities of Al Arqam schools functioning in their communes. The pupils will be taught the deviant teachings and once the children accept them, they will believe they are the true teachings and it will then become difficult to change their thinking."

The Prime Minister said he did not foresee any security problems following the ban but added that if it was not checked, a small group such as this could create a lot of disturbance.

Asked why the Government took so long to take firm action against Al Arqam (which was established in 1968), Dr Mahathir said it was not late.

"Before we come out with a fatwa, we have to carry out an indepth study of the problem.

"In the beginning, as I have said, there were not many deviations (in the teachings). But now it is clear that he (Ashaari Muhammad) claims himself to be Messiah with divine powers."

Dr Mahathir, who had earlier chaired a two-and-a half hour Umno supreme council meeting, said in the light of the National Fatwa Committee's ruling, Umno felt immediate action must be taken to protect the image of Islam.

"Here I wish to say that many foreign newspapers have said that we are fright-

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# PM: Followers have to be rehabilitated

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ened of the movement and this is why we are taking action against them.

"But in reality the action we have taken is to uphold true Islamic teachings and we do not want Malaysians to be hoodwinked by deviants.

"We are also aware that the action against its leaders could have negative repercussions as they may be fanatical and could resort to bad things."

As an example, he said, the United States took firm action against cult leader David Koresh by sending troops who shot dead several of his followers in an effort to flush him out of his camp.

Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians, and some 80 of his followers perished in a fire after a 51-day stand-off with United States Federal agents in Waco, Texas.

"Does this mean the US Government had become frightened of Koresh?" he asked.

"We have not reached the stage of sending troops to stop the Al Arqam movement. But we want to avoid incidents such as the mass suicide by followers of Reverend Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana.

(In that incident, more than 800 people committed mass suicide in November 1978 on the command of the cult leader.)

"There is no reason for the Government to fear the movement. We have a political party which is bigger than Al Arqam and which stresses on Islam."

Asked whether action

would be taken against Umno members who supported the movement, Dr Mahathir said these members were probably unaware that the teachings deviated from the true teachings of Islam and the Government had to make them aware of it.

Asked whether the Government would seek the extradition of Ashaari from whichever country he was in, the Prime Minister said extradition was only for those involved in criminal cases.

"We want to rehabilitate the followers because many of them are unaware that such teachings are against Islam.

"If they know the truth they will not be associated with Al Arqam."

On the move by the movement to take legal action against the Government, he said it was their right.

"We have the evidence to prove them wrong," he said.

On the economic activities of the movement, Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot

prevent their business activities if they do not go against the teachings of Islam."

"But if they do business in order to promote their beliefs, then we cannot allow this."

Earlier, Dr Mahathir said the most important reason (for the ban on the movement) was that its teachings deviated from that of Islam.

"We do not allow that in this country," he told reporters after opening the First East Asian Young Leaders Congress at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

"They (Al Arqam members) must conform with the accepted version of Islamic teachings because what they practise is likely to confuse others in this country."

Asked whether he saw Al Arqam as a political threat, Dr Mahathir said: "I do not

think Malaysians are going to support the movement to form a government in this country."

He added that if Ashaari really had political ambitions he was welcome to put it into practice in a legitimate way.

However, he said, the Al Arqam leader must first return to Malaysia, stop preaching deviant teachings, form a political party and then contest in the elections.

In fact, he said, Ashaari could even join Umno on condition that he first subscribed to Umno's philosophy.

After all, he said, "the second man in Umno now (referring to Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim) was very much against us when he formed the Muslim Youth Movement (Abim) which was very anti-government."

Dr Mahathir was also

asked what he thought of Al Arqam's successful involvement in business in relation to the Government's encouragement for the people to engage in economic activities.

"If you study their businesses thoroughly you will find that they are using little children whom they have to pay nothing at all to do their direct sales.

"They appeal to exclusivity and they play on Muslim sentiments to get customers to build their market. That is not healthy in a multiracial society."

Dr Mahathir said it was up to the authorities to determine whether or not to arrest Ashaari should he return.

"It is not for me to determine. If he has broken the law and they (the authorities) think he should be arrested, they will do so."