

Women reduced to sex slaves

By Sharifah Fatimah and K. Vijayan

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today described the Al Arqam movement as a group which is not only pre-occupied with sex but also one which has degraded women to the status of sex slaves.

He said like deviationist teachings which cropped up in other religions, Al Arqam had been transformed by its leader Ashaari Muhammad into a vehicle for fulfilling his own interest and lust.

"The women followers are more or less sex slaves as they are frequently married off and divorced at the whims of the men. I believe Ashaari himself has had a lot more than four wives.

"I hear that some were married for only 24 hours before they were divorced. This is legalised prostitution," he added.

Dr Mahathir said it was common for movements such as the Al Arqam to start off on the right track only to turn deviationist when its leader became so influential that he could order his followers to carry out anything.

"It is then that they go astray and become a movement which only benefits the interest of the leader," he told reporters after attending a briefing on the country's dadah problem at the Bukit Aman police headquarters here.

Also present were Deputy Home Minister Datuk Megat Junid Megat Ayob and Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor.

He said the focus of deviationist teachings of any religion, be it Christianity or Islam, eventually turned to women and sex and ways to justify having many wives.

Dr Mahathir said the leaders of such movements would begin misusing women once they had successfully gained a large following among women.

"It reflects their preoccupation with sex. Once a man is bored with his wife, he divorces her and marries another female member while his former wife is married off to another man."

He added that although Al Arqam followers acted like pious Muslims and made their women cover their faces, these were mere disguise to hide their preoccupation with sex.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a Reuter report which quoted Indonesian Muslim group, Nahdatul Ulama, as claiming that Umno had once offered posts to Al Arqam leaders and followers.

"I don't know about others but I have never made such an offer," he said.

However, he said, Umno could have accepted Arqam followers when the group had not deviated from the true teachings of Islam.

Asked whether Ashaari had ever asked to join Umno, Dr Mahathir said he had never made such a request.

"Why should he do so when he thinks he is bigger than Umno?"

On whether Ashaari would be arrested should he return, Dr Mahathir said it was up to the authorities to decide. "If the authorities feel that he had broken the law then he will be arrested."

On reports that Arqam members would support the DAP during the coming general election, he said this showed that Arqam was not fighting for Islam but for politics.

Rahim later said Ashaari should return to Malaysia as there is no arrest warrant for him.

He said Ashaari should come back and tell his followers to obey the laws of the country, including the religious laws.

The National Fatwa Committee has banned the Al

Followers told to obey the law

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Arqam and 10 States have adopted it.

"Our intelligence shows Ashaari has told his followers to be patient and wait for him to return home.

"He has also told them to obey the law. As such they should also respect the Fatwa ruling."

He said Ashaari should correct all those youth whom he had led astray.

Rahim said police had received reports from several parents that their children had been led astray but they did not involve underaged children.

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