

# 'No misuse of ISA' promise

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — The Government will not use the Internal Security Act (ISA) to detain just anyone without first trying to rectify that person's wrongdoings, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

"We are in no hurry. The banned Al Arqam movement was carrying out its activities for 20 years before the Government finally acted against them after it had been determined that its members had strayed too far."

He was responding to a question from a participant at the two-day conference on "The Government in a plural society" organised by the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (Ikim) here during a one-hour question-and-answer session.

The participant had asked why the Government did not take stern action against writer Kassim Ahmad (for making statements espousing deviation from Islamic teachings).

Dr Mahathir said there were 600,000 *hadith* (record of the Prophet's sayings and deeds) found after the death of the Prophet. Bukhari, an *ulama* (scholar), had taken the initiative to do intensive research on them during his lifetime.

"Bukhari settled on 7,000 *hadith* which he felt was in accordance with the Quran. This shows that many people had created their own *hadith* for their own interests or the governments' at that time."

Dr Mahathir said Bukhari, despite being an *ulama*, might have left out some genuine *hadith* and picked up some weak ones.

"However, to dismiss all *hadith* and accept only the contents of the Quran is wrong because we must also accept the institution of *hadith*," he said.

To a question that ideologies upheld by humans, including nationalism, were contrary to Islamic law as they were based on the "sovereignty of man" and not

"the sovereignty of God", Dr Mahathir said he could not see how democracy was contrary to Islam.

He said democracy acknowledged the voice of the majority.

Dr Mahathir cited an example where after the death of Prophet Muhammad, his companions had the freedom to appoint their leaders and "that is what Malaysia is doing today".

He said democracy could also be manipulated as in the ancient Greek city-states when the right to select the government was confined to only about 10 per cent of its citizens.

In those days, those without property, women and slaves had no right to choose their government.

Dr Mahathir said he did not deny the existence of the sovereignty of God, but it depended on the acknowledgement of the masses.

"Someone may claim to be Prime Minister and says that God says so. Who knows? There have also been cases where some people claimed to be the Imam Mahadi (the chosen one). Who knows?"

The packed hall burst into laughter when Dr Mahathir said: "I myself had never thought of becoming the Prime Minister, but it happened that way... what to do."

Dr Mahathir said the people must understand that everyone of them had a role to play and not "just wait for justice to fall from the sky".

He said democracy in Malaysia was not like in some countries where the people walked naked or had the freedom to marry their own sexes.

"Anyway, if there are suggestions on how we can choose the Prime Minister by other ways, we would like to consider them," he said, causing the audience to roar with laughter again.

To a question that there were still voices of dissatisfaction because non-Muslims were appointed into the administration, Dr Mahathir said it would be un-

fair to reject those who were known to be just in carrying out their responsibilities.

"Only the rulers cannot be from other races."

He said, in the future, such voices might not be heard again as the racial gap drew closer.

"It again depends on the decision of the masses. If they think the Prime Minister has wrongly appointed (people into the administration), they can remove him (the Prime Minister) and appoint another person who appoints people in line with their wishes," he said.

He also said that Muslims should be the best people on earth, but today there were Muslim terrorists.

According to Dr Mahathir, the feudal system, for example, can also be good if properly adopted, such as during the reign of Caliph Harun Al-Rashid who paid much concern to the welfare of his subjects.

In a democratic system, there is no restriction (in term of selection of leaders and representatives) and this made the people's representatives responsible to the people — who are their masters.

"In a democratic system, the people can change or retain the government through elections.

"If a government delivers, the people can retain it. Otherwise, the government can be thrown out. Put a mark, place it in the ballot box and out you go," he said.

He said that there was, however, no such thing as absolute freedom because it would lead to individuals doing things according to their desires.

In the West, he said, freedom had plunged the people into a "chaotic situation". "There is no family institution. People live with whoever they like, out of wedlock. In the end you may find marriages between brothers and sisters. We don't allow things to go that far".

He said that though the West might want to claim that Malaysia was undemo-

cratic, "we are convinced that our system is better than theirs'. We want to preserve good values and our extended family system".

To a participant's comment that Islam is tolerant and that it should act as *rahmatul alamin* (blessing to all mankind), Dr Mahathir said Islam was just to all, but whether it could be accepted by all should also be taken into account.

He was sad that there was no one major power in the Islamic world which could protect smaller Muslim countries from being oppressed.

"Not being able to do so is a sin because they do not know how to administer effectively and to merge as a major power," he said.

He said that it was the responsibility of all Muslim governments to administer their countries well.

"In Malaysia, we are confident we can train our people to compete with others. We will give opportunities to them as we know they are not inferior."

Asked on the fear among Malaysians to discuss *bangsa Malaysia*, Dr Mahathir said he did not understand why they should be "shy" to discuss it.

He explained that it had been accepted that every citizen of the country was *bangsa Malaysia*, except that they represented different races.

"As long as they are loyal to Malaysia, we accept them, but it is certainly difficult to determine the degree of loyalty... we cannot check with things such as a thermometer," he said.

He said that as such it should be wise to discuss the matter in today's "open society" and in good faith.

On a lighter vein, Dr Mahathir said that if there were those who wanted to create chaos through such matters, the Government, though reluctantly, could use the ISA. "Though the West criticises us for using the ISA, I think they also long to have such an Act," he concluded.